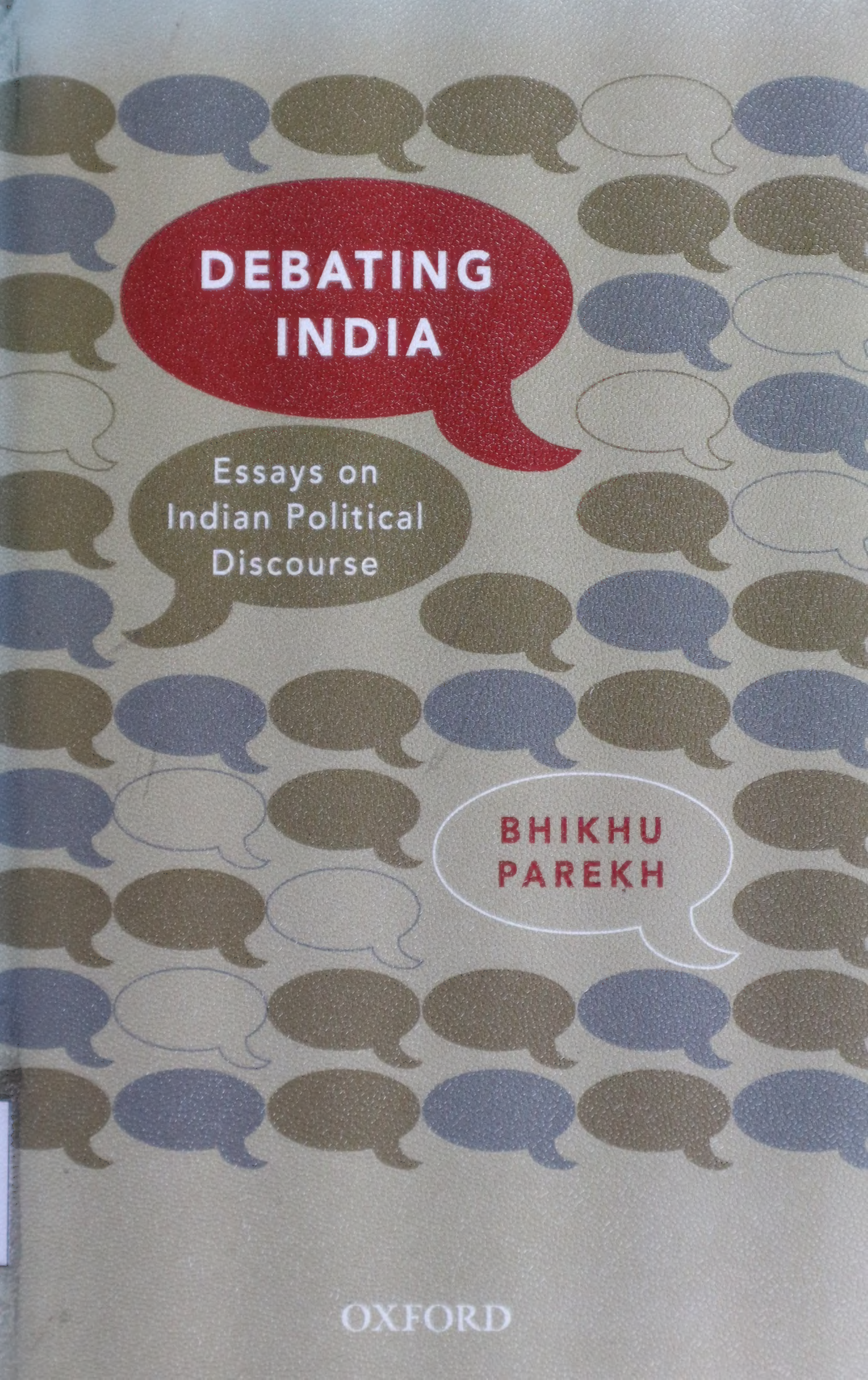




DEBATING INDIA

Essays on
Indian Political
Discourse

BHIKHU
PAREKH

OXFORD

India has had a long tradition of public debate going back to around 1000 BCE. But surprisingly, the knowledge of its existence has largely remained confined to a small field of critics or specialists.

Debating India traces the origins and development of the Indian tradition of public debate and the various forms it took at different times in Indian history. It examines some of the major debates that occurred during the independence struggle and the ways in which they structured the conceptual and moral parameters of the Indian political imagination. The debates involved Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Ambedkar, and Hindu militants, and centred on the kind of country India was and should aspire to be.

Gandhi's non-violent struggle claims to provide an answer to deep differences of views and conflicts of interest. Presenting riveting accounts, such as of Einstein's views on Gandhi's philosophy of *Ahimsā* or of Gandhi–Tagore debates, and through an imaginary dialogue between Gandhi and Osama bin Laden, Parekh critically examines the strengths and weaknesses of Gandhian philosophy. In the process, the book points to a richer and politically more realistic approach to public debate than are currently on offer.



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To my friends

Karam Marwah, Tariq Modood, and Kaimas Mehta

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INTRODUCTION

The twelve essays that make up this volume were written over a period of twenty years. Some appear here for the first time; the rest, published before, have been substantially revised. In their own different ways, they are all concerned with the ideas and debates that have shaped modern India. Although the essays have a common concern, each is a self-contained exploration of a particular theme. Putting them together generates the temptation and the pressure to fit them into a rather rigid, overarching framework in which each is conscripted in the service of a common thesis and, like a well-disciplined unit, expected to perform its assigned role. Since structuring this volume in that way would have destroyed the fluidity and freedom of exploration that an essay gives and subverted its identity, I have resisted the temptation to do so. Each essay pursues a related but distinct theme, speaks in its own voice, and, from time to time, gestures to its immediate and distant conceptual neighbours without directly speaking to them.

The essays fall into two broad categories and are divided into two parts. The first part traces the historical origins and development of the Indian tradition of public debate, critically examines some of the great debates and ideas of the twentieth century, and explores the ways in which they shaped the conceptual structure and practice of Indian democracy. India is both a subject or an active participant in these debates and their object of discussion. The title of the book *Debating India* aims to capture both.

The second part, though rooted in India, has a wider ambition. Although rational discussion and debate is the best way to resolve differences of views and conflicts of interests, it has its limits. Human beings are guided by self-interest, deep-seated prejudices, moral dogmatism, feelings of ill will and hatred, and reason is often powerless before them. Violence appears to be the only answer, but it brings its own problems. Gandhi's great contribution was to offer an alternative

in the form of non-violence, which is supposed to facilitate rational discussion by removing the factors obstructing it. Gandhi is at the centre of the second part, and the essays included in it deal with the questions raised by his alternative.

India has a long tradition of public debate going back to around 1000 BCE. Rather surprisingly, the knowledge of its very existence, let alone its historical continuity, logical structure, and diversity of forms, has largely remained confined to the cognoscenti. To his enormous credit, Amartya Sen has redressed this in his deeply reflective and highly influential *The Argumentative Indian*, so much so that the title of the book has now become part of popular discourse, almost a badge of identity Indians proudly use to describe themselves.¹

While I agree with much of what Sen says, I depart from him in several respects. My difficulty begins with the title of the book itself. While the term 'argumentative' is sometimes used in the sense of being methodical in one's reasoning and weighing up arguments before reaching a conclusion, in its more common and conventional sense, it refers to someone who argues for the sake of arguing, finds fault with whatever the other person says, and is in general disagreeable. In this sense, the term is pejorative and not a compliment that many Indians take it to be. If the descriptions were true, its pejorative connotation would not matter, but it is not. To the extent that one can be bold enough to generalize about a people, especially as diverse as Indians, they hold strong views but are not unduly assertive about them and feel relaxed about their differences. Sen is more convincing when he talks of India's 'argumentative tradition', where the adjective carries the meaning he has in mind and refers to a well-established practice of giving and demanding reasons for the views in dispute.

The argumentative tradition that Sen discusses and of which he gives several examples largely refers to disagreements between two individuals or schools, and overlooks the equally and, in some contexts, far more important public debates conducted before large audiences, having a formal structure and involving a binding verdict. These carefully organized debates that shaped public reason for centuries in India were as common as interpersonal discussions and seem to be largely unique to it. Furthermore, they were not always adversarial or designed to refute rival views: sometimes they were also a cooperative attempt to discover the *tattva* or truth about a given subject. As the old maxim

puts it, *vāde vāde jāyate tattvabodhah* (truth is discovered and assimilated or realized by debate and discussion).

The classical Indian tradition was not as homogeneous as some commentators suggest. When the disputants belonged to the same school and agreed on its *pramānas* or criteria of epistemological validation, their debate took one form; it took a different form when they belonged to different schools and needed to find independent, neutral, or some other mutually acceptable *pramānas*. Furthermore, the argumentative reach of the tradition was uneven, a feature Sen overlooks. It was vigorous, rigorous, and radical in its discussions of epistemological, logical, and metaphysical issues but rather timid in relation to social and political matters. With the qualified exception of some groups of Buddhists and materialists, it either accepted the caste and class hierarchy as self-evident or offered a dubious defence of it, and in either case remained largely non-argumentative and apologetic.²

During its long history, the classical tradition faced new challenges. The marginalized groups from time to time asked disturbing questions and provoked pockets of debate. A much more robust challenge was presented by radically different ways of thought and life as represented by Muslims, Christian missionaries, and secular modernists, and the tradition underwent important changes in the course of its public debates with them. While the Indian tradition of debate has elements of continuity, it is also marked by discontinuity. The former gives it a measure of inner coherence and singularity; the latter explains its plural strands.

Taking account of these and related points, Chapter 1 outlines the broad history of the Indian tradition of debate and analyses its diverse forms, their logical structures, and the challenges it faced in different historical periods. Since colonial modernity brought with it a radically new world of ideas and raised political questions that the tradition had not faced before in their new form, it brought about profound changes in it. It led to much intellectual churning in India, and gave rise over time to an identifiable tradition of *political* discourse evident in the debates occurring during the struggle for independence and culminating in those of the Constituent Assembly.

At Independence, India needed to define its identity in order to unite its people and give their existence a collective focus. Its Constitution provided a formal statement of its identity, especially the Preamble, which stated the country's guiding principles and provided a justificatory

basis of the various Constitutional provisions. National symbols such as the anthem, the flag, the crest, and the motto articulated the national identity at a different level. While considerable work has been done on the Constitution, the national symbols have not received the attention they deserve. Most of them were contested and led to heated debates. Chapter 2 discusses how the latter were articulated and resolved, sometimes by devious means.

Although Gandhi was a dominant political figure adored by millions during the struggle for Independence, he was not a dominant intellectual presence, and many including not only the intellectuals but also ordinary men and women disagreed with some of his ideas, actions, and vision of India. This disjunction was possible partly because his authority was based on his personal and political charisma, not the power of his ideology or 'Gandhism', and partly because Indians had no difficulty sharing his political goals and admiring his great leadership, while disagreeing with and even rejecting much of the rest of his thought.³ As his hold over his countrymen grew stronger, Gandhi was subjected to close scrutiny and was at the centre of seven major debates that included Hindu nationalists, orthodox Brahmins, Jinnah, Ambedkar, modernists, the Left, and Tagore. These debates covered different areas, raised issues of the greatest importance, filtered out certain views, alerted Indians to what was at stake, and left the inspiring legacy of a rich and vibrant political discourse. I concentrate on those between Gandhi and Tagore in Chapter 3, partly because I have discussed others elsewhere and partly because it is clearly focused and covers a large range of important issues. I argue that although the two shared much in common, which explains their high mutual respect, and shared views on India's plurality, intercultural dialogue, and rejection of nationalism, they also differed in their visions of human excellence, which explains their divergent views on such important issues as non-cooperation, spinning, boycott of foreign cloth, and the Bihar earthquake.

Chapter 4 discusses Ambedkar, a very different figure from Tagore whose disagreements with Gandhi went much deeper and whose attitude to him was wholly hostile. He looked at Hindu society from the perspective of its most oppressed and dehumanized victims, and demanded that the Hindu social order and its underlying ideology needed a revolutionary change. He also thought that Indian Independence and democracy meant little to Dalits unless provisions

were made to promote their interests and limit the power of the majority. Since, in his view, neither goal could be achieved, without an organized struggle by the Dalits—and they could not mount one without a collective sense of agency and a clear alternative vision—Ambedkar provided them with the necessary conceptual, ideological, and linguistic tools. His demand for a radical reconstitution of Hindu society as a precondition of Dalit acceptance of it was at odds with Gandhi's idea of integration through assimilation, just as his concern to give the Dalits a separate collective identity went against Gandhi's attempt to make them part of a shared Hindu identity. Their deep disagreements on these and related issues provoked debates that went to the heart of what it meant to be a Hindu and an Indian, and were some of the most heated and intractable in pre-Independence India.

Just as Gandhi fashioned the Indian nation, Nehru was the architect of the Indian state. Nehru presided over the state for seventeen years during its most critical period, designed its institutional architecture, and gave it what he called a national philosophy or ideology, which so profoundly shaped the country's consciousness that it became an important component of its identity. Without his stewardship, the Indian state with all its strengths and limitations would not have been what it is today. His national philosophy was the product of nearly a century-long debate between different visions of India and marked the victory of the modernist. Since it involved a radical break with the country's past, Nehru needed to justify it to his countrymen and get them morally and emotionally committed to it. Chapter 5 on him discusses why he opted for it and how he justified it. As parts of his national philosophy ran into difficulty and failed to deliver on the promise, it provoked a critical debate. To his great credit, Nehru appreciated the force of the criticism and set about revising it, which is the theme of Chapter 6.

The last chapter in Part I, Chapter 7 looks closely at the Indian democracy, a product of both colonial and precolonial intellectual and political traditions. Independent India introduced full-blooded democracy in a poor, multi-communal, highly hierarchical, and largely illiterate society traumatized by the horrendously violent division of the country. Yet it has sustained it for over six decades with only a brief interregnum, for which its tradition of public debate and peaceful resolution of differences deserves some credit. While it has ensured free and fair elections

and a peaceful transfer of power, its quality of public debate and political deliberation has suffered a decline in recent decades. Issues relating to the equitable distribution of the fruits of development have largely been ignored, and poverty and growing inequality do not arouse the anger and shame they should. The chapter articulates the specificity of Indian democracy and examines the reasons why its deliberative and ethical quality leaves much to be desired.

Gandhi's non-violence is the centre of the next set of four chapters. Since rational debate and discussion runs up against the limits imposed by prejudices, self-righteousness, self-interest, and so on, it cannot proceed beyond a certain point without removing the latter. For Gandhi, this is done by appealing to the opponent's conscience, activating his or her shared sense of humanity, forging moral bonds with him or her, and establishing a new basis of relationship. Unlike violence, such non-violent resistance is not opposed to, or even separate from, but rather an integral part of the overall process of rational discussion, being both preceded by and helping create an atmosphere conducive to the latter. For Gandhi, it is basically reason in action supporting reason in discussion. While violence represents a breakdown or suspension of rational discussion, non-violent resistance continues it at a different level and in a different medium.

For Gandhi, the view of reason lying at the heart of the modern view of rational debate is part of the problem and needs radical reconsideration. It detaches the head from the heart, reason from moral emotions, relies almost entirely on the 'force' of intellectual arguments to bludgeon the opponent's reason into submission, possesses limited persuasive resources, and, like everything else in the modern world, has an element of violence built into it. Furthermore, since arguments alone do not always work and injustices have to be redressed, violence appears to be the only rational answer. The abstract and coercive modern reason thus has the predictable though paradoxical effect of rationalizing or legitimizing violence, its opposite.

Gandhi advocated a different view of reason. It was embedded in a sympathetic and imaginative appreciation of the opponent's world of thought and feeling, involved arguments but was not narrowly argumentative, appealed to his sense of decency and humanity, and aimed not so much to win an argument as to win him over, a very different thing. For Gandhi, a rational debate stood a chance of success only if

it took such a rich view of reason, was both open-minded and open-hearted, and accommodated non-violent action as an integral part of the process of rational discussion. This is an important and often neglected contribution to the theory and practice of rational discussion and debate, and deserves careful analysis.⁴

The first chapter in Part II, Chapter 8 discusses how Gandhi's contemporaries, like him, appreciated the limits of rational discussion but abhorred violence, understood his proposed alternative, and if and within what limits they were persuaded by it. This helps us both to locate him in his historical context and against the background of the concerns of his time, and also to understand how a particular way of understanding him and his non-violence developed over time. Since it is not possible to discuss all or even most of his great contemporaries, I select Einstein who unlike Martin Buber, Bonhoeffer, Romain Rolland, Niebuhr, and others was not swayed by his religious stature and appeal, and judged his thought and praxis in their own terms.

After highlighting the limitations of the traditional discourse on Gandhi's non-violence, Chapter 9 analyses its philosophical basis, its roots in his concept of truth, its mode of operation, and the forms it took during its travel across cultures. While admitting its political potency and moral appeal, many of his critics argue that contrary to his belief, it could not work against fanatical opponents and under totalitarian regimes. I discuss this debate and suggest that the answer is more complex. While Gandhi's non-violence would not work once such regimes are well-established as his critics rightly maintain, it could, given certain conditions, work during the period leading up to such a situation.

Chapter 10 on Gandhi addresses a related but different question. Gandhi's non-violence assumes that violence is evil and that when rational discussion proves ineffective, non-violent struggle is the only morally acceptable course of action. What if someone does not share his moral condemnation of violence and believes that its use is fully justified if that is the only way to secure justice? My imaginary dialogue between Osama bin Laden, the putative holder of such a view, and Gandhi is intended to explore whether Gandhi can convince him that he is wrong. I argue that although such fundamental differences cannot be resolved, Gandhi can give good reasons why bin Laden should adopt non-violence on prudential grounds and why his project of fusing religion and state is fatally flawed.

Religion is a potent force in all societies including ours, and an inter-religious dialogue is rightly seen as necessary for peace and harmony within and between societies. Views about its nature, depth, and scope, however, vary greatly. For those who believe that their religion is the fullest revelation of the divine will or think that close interaction with another religion dilutes or threatens their identity, such a dialogue is largely instrumental in nature and limited to better mutual understanding and cooperation on practical issues. Gandhi took a more robust view of it, stressing its transformative potential and practising it at various levels. At the most elementary level, it involved multifaith prayer; at a slightly higher level, a respectful study and better understanding of other religions; and at the highest, uninhibited borrowing of what one found valuable in other religions and expanding and deepening one's religious consciousness. Refusing to be imprisoned within his religion, Gandhi borrowed generously from others, especially Christianity, and developed his own brand of ecumenically oriented Hinduism. Chapter 11 discusses how he justified such a view of inter-religious dialogue, redefined the conventional bounded or closed view of religion, and what we can learn from him.

Although the last chapter on friendship does not directly relate to the central themes of Parts I and II, it is important for several reasons. Friendship has been a recurrent subject of discussion in Indian thought for at least two millennia, with Indian writers debating its proper place in human life, its limits, and whether the moral obligations it entails may override others. The idea of friendship also plays an important part in Indian self-understanding at both individual and collective levels, and we cannot hope to understand the country's moral and political discourse and practice without some idea of how Indians define its nature and obligations.

The Indian view of friendship is a product of several cultural influences such as Vedic Brahmanism, Buddhism, the two epics, Islam, and Western modernity. Since discussing its history and various strands would have taken up far more space than I have and in any case exceeds my competence, I have limited myself to the two epics whose influence on Indian thought is still considerable and in which the moral dilemmas of friendship are debated with great skill. Surprising as it may seem, there is not a single book or even a substantial body of articles on this important subject. The chapter on it is intended to flag up this

influential but neglected area and to invite more competent hands to explore it in greater detail.

The major themes of these twelve chapters have fascinated me for over two decades. At different times, I had thought of writing monographs on some of them, especially the distinctiveness and different forms of the Indian traditions of debate, the deepest sources of Gandhi–Ambedkar differences, Indian views of reason, and the Indian conception of friendship. This has not been possible because of academic and parliamentary commitments, and as age is catching up, it is now no longer a realistic objective. Although the essays included here are somewhat tentative and inadequate summaries of long gestated thoughts, I like to hope that the charitable reader will nevertheless find them of sufficient interest to carry the inquiry further.

PART I

PUBLIC DEBATES

I

INDIAN TRADITIONS OF PUBLIC DEBATE

It is an undoubted fact that in India, religious and philosophical thinkers were able to enjoy perfect, nearly absolute freedom for a long period. The freedom of thought in ancient India was so considerable as to find no parallel in the West before the most recent age.

—Max Weber

Sukshma vivādo viprānām shula
Kshātro jayājayao

(Brahmins measure victory and defeat by subtle debate,
Kshatriyas by brute force)

—Mahābhārata, 8.12. 24

Debate is the preferred form of rationality in India.

—B.K. Matilal

The tradition of public debate has a long history in India, going back to around 1000 BCE. The absence of an officially endorsed and enforced religious and philosophical orthodoxy encouraged a remarkable freedom of thought and expression. There were disputes about the interpretations of Vedic hymns, sacrificial rites and rituals, image worship, and the meaning of such practices as vertical religious marks on the forehead. Later they extended to large philosophical questions about the nature of the Brahman, the atman, karma, and the meaning and goals of life, as well as whether the universe was created or eternal.

This gave rise to several new schools such as the Atheists, the Buddhists, the Jains, and the Lokayata that challenged the dominant Brahmanic tradition.¹ There were as many as ten different schools of thought in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. Their followers went about preaching and debating their doctrines in halls (*samayappavāḍakasala*) specifically built for this purpose, and sometimes they even stayed in the same places. There were internal debates among the Jains, especially between the followers of Śvetāmbara and Digambara schools, about such subjects as whether women could attain liberation and were qualified to be mendicants and what the basic principles of their religion required in certain situations. Buddhist councils debated their central doctrines as well as the new issues that had appeared on the public agenda, and they sought to secure an agreement between conflicting views. The first such council at Rajagriha shortly after the Buddha's death drew delegates from different regions and schools to settle the master's teachings. As differences grew or new issues emerged, it was followed by those in Vaisali, Pataliputra, and Kashmir. Sometimes they were able to reach a consensus. When they did not, the dissenting groups formed a rival school.²

Public disputes and debates were not limited to religion and philosophy, and extended to other areas such as medicine, law, politics, grammar, and even literature. *Carak Samhitā* gives interesting examples of doctors debating the causes of different diseases and their diagnoses of individual patients under the impartial chairmanship of Atri, who adjudicated not only the substance of their views but also how they arrived at and defended them. Debates occurred among the writers on Dharmashāstras and Arthashāstras, and centred not so much on the overall design of the moral and social order on which there was a broad agreement as on how best to reason about the subject, what method of investigation was best suited to it, and how to structure and present such works. These debates did not remain confined to their respective areas. The methods and styles of reasoning and even the vocabulary developed in one area influenced those in others and led to cross-fertilization.

Over time, these debates stimulated an inquiry into the nature of debate or rational discussion itself and gave rise to the discipline of *vādvidyā* or *vādshāstra* from which logic developed in ancient India. Vādvidyā studied the purposes and forms of debate, how they should be conducted, what counted as good and bad arguments, and when

the debate was deemed to be settled. Although different schools of thought, especially Buddhism and Jainism, took different views on these questions, they influenced each other and developed considerable agreement on the rules and methods of public discussion. Carak Samhitā, Nyāya Sutra, and Asanga's *Bodhisattva-Bhumi* are good examples of this.³ *Kathavatthu*, composed in Pali by Magaliputta Tissa around 255 BCE, is one of the most important texts, partly because earlier Sanskrit texts have not survived. Different schools also developed *vād* manuals, instructing their followers into how to conduct a debate, what fallacies to avoid, and how to detect weaknesses in the opponent's position.

Although different schools differed in the way they distinguished, classified, and characterized debates, they broadly agreed that these were of two types—namely, *tattvanirninisu* (concerned to determine the truth) and *vijigisu* (concerned to win). As *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* puts it, those engaged in the former were *sabrahmachārins* or fellow seekers.⁴ Although there is no consistency of usage between different schools, this kind of debate was often called *vāda*. As Vacasspati says in his *Tātparyā Tikā*, the aim of *vāda* is to attain the right understanding of the subject under discussion by means of an open-minded dialogue.⁵ Those engaged in it were motivated by the desire to know the truth (*Tattvabubhutsuna saha katha*). Truth could only be discovered by looking at a subject from different points of view and assessing the arguments for and against it—that is, only through a discussion (*Vāde vāde jāyate tattvabodhah*). In the *Gītā*, Krishna calls *vāda* the highest form of discussion (*Vādah pravadatamaham*). In the Buddhist *Pitakas*, those engaged in *vāda* (*tirthikas*) put forward their opposite views in an honest search for truth and accepted with humility the truth of the opponent's position when they were convinced of it. Faults in others' arguments were noted and pointed out but not dwelt upon or used to discredit them. *Vāda* may therefore be better translated as deliberation rather than debate or disputation.

Vāda was considered the best way to discover the truth or rather to arrive at the right understanding of a subject for several related reasons. As the Jain story of seven blind men describing the elephant on the basis of its particular parts illustrated, every human being necessarily viewed a subject from his particular standpoint. Since he saw only certain aspects of it and his understanding of it was necessarily partial

and limited, he needed others to correct and complement him. Furthermore, human intellect was fallible; no one's reasoning was free of defects; and hence he needed others to point out his mistakes. More importantly, every human being was attached to his views, tended to identify with them, and found it difficult to distance himself from and take a detached and objective attitude to them. Attachment brought rigidity of thought, possessiveness, pride, fear, anger, dogmatic certainty, and similar other passions that clouded the mind and disturbed its capacity to pursue the truth. Subjecting one's views to others' scrutiny was a necessary corrective to this tendency. Vāda, a patient and dispassionate inquiry, required not only an open mind but also a pure heart—a heart free of *rāg* (attachment) and *dwesh* (hostility to others). In the Indian tradition, the individual's moral character shaped the quality of his reasoning—*buddhi* (cultivated or refined intelligence) involved far more than *tarka* (formal reasoning), and epistemology was closely bound up with ethics.

In contrast to the *tattvanirninisu* discussion or deliberation that sometimes took place between different schools of thought but usually within each of them, the *vijigisu* debate was conducted with one's opponent, usually belonging to a rival school. Its aim was to win by showing that the opponent's position was unsustainable. Not every opponent was 'worthy of debate'. He must show that his position was *prima facie* plausible and rested on good grounds, and some kind of case could be made for it. The debate was conducted in public and presided over by an impartial (*madhyastha*) officer assisted by judges knowledgeable about the subject and acceptable to both sides. The judges intervened in the debate, asked questions, sought clarification, and delivered their binding verdict. The audience too had the right to participate in the debate and ask questions. A successful debater earned the title of a *vādin*. The more ambitious *vādin* travelled to different parts of the country, challenging local *vādins* and hoping to acquire the highest title of *vādivatala* as Sankara, Ramanuja, Vallabha, Madhava, and others did. Sankara, the most distinguished among them, travelled through the country, defeating the sects of Vaishnavas, Saivas, Saktas, and Sauras. He built a body of disciples who accompanied him and sometimes took on his rivals themselves.⁶

Although the debate was to be conducted by fair means, unfair means such as linguistic tricks, dubious intellectual manoeuvres, drawing

questionable distinctions, setting logical traps, and inflated rhetoric were considered not only permissible but also necessary under certain circumstances. These included an opponent who was unduly argumentative and not seriously interested in the debate, and who kept raising all kinds of irrelevant or implausible objections. The debate then took the form of *vitanda* and had no other aim than to 'smash', 'demolish', or 'hit' the opponent (*pratipaksha-hinah* or *dusana-mātram*). Conservative writers went further and argued that *vitanda* could, indeed should, be used against those challenging the prevailing social order and beliefs, 'just as the hedge of thorny branches is put up for the protection of sprouting seeds' as the Nyāya Sutra puts it.⁷ For *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, *vitanda* was justified against heretics, atheists, free thinkers, and *Vedanindakas*. It was commonly used by the orthodox against the reformers when the former had no hope of defeating the latter in a debate, and it remained a fairly common Brahmanic practice from the Buddhist times until the early decades of the twentieth century. Although the Jains disapproved of its dishonesty and violence and did not even call it a debate, they too practised it for both protective and proselytizing purposes.

Debates occurred in several ways. Sometimes the king invited the proponents of different doctrines to debate their views in public.⁸ Sometimes the local pandits challenged their critics or exponents of new systems of thought to a public confrontation. However the confrontation started, a debate began with a challenge and ended with a mutually agreed form of surrender. The challenger identified a particular subject, question, or area for debate and formulated his position in fairly precise terms. To avoid frivolous debates, he was expected to be a scholar well versed in the subject. Different schools of thought demanded different degrees of intellectual rigour and precision in a debate, one of the most rigorous being the Nyāya school founded by Aksapada Gautama at the beginning of the Common Era (CE). It developed an elaborate set of rules and turned the debate, which it called *kathā* (from *kath*, meaning to converse or discuss), into a rigorous combat resembling a game of chess. A fallacy in an argument was called a thorn (*kantaka*); remedying it, removing the thorn (*kantakoddhāra*). When a disputant detected a fallacy, he pronounced 'check' or 'stop the argument' (*nigrahassthāna*). If his opponent successfully answered him, the argument proceeded further. Twenty-two

types of such 'censures' or 'defeat situations' were identified in the Nyāya school. These included such things as modifying, shifting, or implicitly denying the original thesis, giving untenable reasons for it, changing the reasons given earlier, being evasive, and using misleading similes and analogies. The opponent was declared defeated when he was confused, lost for words, rendered incoherent, or reduced to contradiction.

A religious leader or the founder of a new system of ethics was sometimes expected to meet higher standards. Although he obviously had to defend his views, winning an argument was not enough. He also had to win over his opponent, attract him to his ideas (*pasidanti*), engage his sympathies, and secure his whole-hearted assent such that he was prepared to follow him. The Buddha's case illustrates this well. He found the conventional disputations of the Brahmanic kind combative, more like intellectual duels than a search for truth, irrelevant to the central question of how one should live, and likely to lead to bitterness, jealousy, and unhealthy competition. He called a halt to them among his followers and tended to avoid them himself for which he was widely criticized. Nigrodha, a *Parivrajaka* with a large following, remarked that since the Buddha did not 'converse enough' and was not at home in the assembly of scholars, his 'wisdom was damaged by solitude'. He even thought that if the Buddha were to debate in public, they 'could roll him over like an empty pot'.⁹ The Buddha was aware of these and other criticisms and the standards he was expected to meet, as his following remarks make clear. He says it could be said of him that although he issues a challenge,¹⁰

1. he does this in empty places and not in assemblies;
2. he issues his challenge in assemblies, but he does it without confidence;
3. he challenges with confidence, ... but people do not ask him questions;
4. people ask him questions, but he does not answer;
5. he answers their questions, ... but he does not win over their minds with his exposition;
6. he wins over their minds with his exposition ... but they do not find him worth hearing;
7. they find him worth hearing but after they have heard him they are not convinced;

8. having heard him, they are convinced, ... but the faithful make no sign of their belief;
9. the faithful give the sign of their belief, ... but they do not follow the path to the truth;
10. they follow the path ... but they do not succeed.

The Buddha developed a unique style of debate that included philosophical arguments as well as appeals to others' and his own experiences, telling stories, invoking his moral authority and achievements, and referring to the ways in which his doctrines had been practised and found salutary by his followers. His debating style was less elaborate and formal, and consisted in exposing the internal contradictions of his opponent's position by asking short and pointed questions. He was also more focused and conciliatory. He ignored questions and criticisms that had no relevance to his main claims, and generally aimed not so much to refute his opponent's position as to show that while it had its strengths, his own was superior.

Like the Buddha, Mahavira too was initially averse to disputation, but later joined in, this being the only way to establish his reputation and recruit or retain his followers. He successfully debated with such well-known rival thinkers as Saddālaputta, his chief disciple Gautam, and Kasi Sraman. He went even further than the Buddha in embracing the debating tradition and trained a formidable body of as many as four hundred vādins in the art of public debate. The vādins were encouraged to go and study in rival schools of thought in order better to understand, criticize, and refute their opponents' doctrines.

Leading thinkers invited or participated in public debates for several reasons. Since they thought they had discovered the truth, they were keen to prove and propagate it, and refute what they regarded as falsehood. This was as true of the Buddha and Mahavira as of Sankara, Ramanuja, and others. Victory in the debate brought fame, recognition, status, and followers, as well as wealth through royal rewards and lucrative private instruction. It also helped the leader of a school to hold on to his followers by reassuring them that their doctrines were not mistaken. The debate was something of a performance and the thrill of victory was also one of its motives.

Although the rules of debate did not involve punishment, the disputants sometimes agreed on one and turned the debate into some kind of non-violent battle, a Brahmanic version of Kshatriya combat.¹¹

The punishment could involve acknowledging the superiority of the opponent and becoming his follower, leaving the area oneself or along with one's followers, or, in rare instances, committing suicide, usually by drowning.¹² In his debate with Mandan Misra, Sankara volunteered to give up his sanyasi's way of life and don white garments if he was defeated. In another case, he asked Sudhanvā, the king of Ujjain, to arrange a debate between him and the Jain scholars on the condition that the loser would accept the religion of the victor.¹³ The debate, lasting several days, centered on the Jain views that the universe and the soul were eternal and neither created nor died. Sankara won and the Jains embraced Vedism. In another case, when Malla, a Jain, defeated Nanda, a Buddhist, in Broach, the king ordered the latter and his family to leave the area.

It is not entirely clear why the debates involved punishment and the latter took the form it did. Punishment seems to have been meant to discourage flippant challenges of which there were many, to ensure that the participants fully prepared themselves for the debate, and even perhaps to discourage reformist challenges to the social order. It took the forms it did for several reasons. The loser was to become the winner's follower to show that he was not only defeated but also genuinely won over and was convinced not only of the error of his views but also the truth of his opponent's. As to why he and his followers were to leave the area, this could be because they were now a defeated people subject to condescension and contempt and did not wish to lead such a life, or because the winner wanted to free the area of dissenters and potential sources of trouble. As to drowning, this might be either the loser's choice because he had been humiliated and felt a sense of shame or it might be demanded by the victor to frighten him off the debate or as a form of public humiliation.

Since the truth of one's views, status, money, and individual and collective pride were at stake, the debates were not always peaceful and civil. This was particularly the case when they involved beliefs and practices underpinning the social order and affecting the privileged position of those in power. They then became heated, abusive, and even fierce, and were marred by violence instigated by the regionally and locally dominant elite. Hiuen Tsiang (Schwen Zhang) provides a fairly typical example of this. Since some priests, Buddhist as well as others, refused to recognize Mahāyāna followers as Buddhists and even abused

them, he asked the Nalanda monastery to arrange a public debate. King Siladitya agreed and summoned all the Sramanas and Brahmins. Tsiang began by stating his view and offered his head 'as a recompense' if anything in it was 'contrary to reason' or to the Buddha's teaching. As no one came forward to debate with him, the Hinayana followers, fearing defeat, created a commotion and tried to kill him. The king intervened to restore peace, declared Tsiang a winner and gave him the title of *Mahāyānadeva*.¹⁴

Since debates were heated and occasionally violent, kings kept an eye on them and urged self-restraint and moderation. The edicts of Aśoka, whose reign like those before him had witnessed sectarian quarrels, urged the followers of different sects to be civil and courteous to each other. Although their doctrinal differences were important, different sects also shared several ethical principles in common. They were free to argue and compete with each other at the doctrinal level, but they were advised to do so in a spirit of mutual respect. Disparaging other sects and boasting about one's own gave the latter a bad name and made it an object of hatred. Aśoka wanted the followers of all sects to be *bahushruta*—to hear a wide variety of views—and arranged public debates between them. As one of his edicts states, '[t]he followers of all denominations are honored by me, and the honour is paid in various forms. Nevertheless showing personal regard for them is the chief thing in my opinion.'¹⁵

In philosophical debates disputants defended their positions by appealing to *pramānas* (from *mā*, meaning to measure) or sources of valid knowledge. Different schools recognized and prioritized different *pramānas*. Carvaka stressed perception (*pratyaksha*); the Buddhists, perception and inference (*anumān*); Sankhya, both these as well as verbal testimony (*śabda*); some Nyāya schools added analogy (*upamāna*); some others, realization (*sāksātkāra*) and intuitive experience (*anubhava*). Orthodox Brahmins added the Vedas, but these had no authority for the Sankhyas, the Yoga school, the Buddhists, and the Jains. When the disputants belonged to the same school, they appealed to the *pramānas* recognized by it including the authoritative teachings of its founder, if any. When they belonged to different schools, three strategies were commonly employed. The first and most common was to appeal to such shared principles as internal consistency, non-contradiction and coherence, the aim being to show

that the opponent's position could not be consistently maintained and led to absurd conclusions. Second, sometimes the disputants agreed on what *pramānas* to accept for the purpose of their debate (*samaya-bandha*) and aimed to defeat each other within the agreed framework. Third, on other occasions, they accepted the *pramānas* of the opponent's school for the purpose of the debate and aimed to show that even when judged by them, their position was ultimately untenable.

Within the Brahmanic tradition, the Vedic literature was the final source of appeal, and Vedic truths were the benchmark against which all truth claims were judged. Reason by itself was supposed to be *shushka tarka* or purely formal and empty, and needed to rely on spiritual truths grasped by intuition or mystical experiences. Every *āchārya* aimed to show that his doctrines were consistent with the *Brahmasutra*, the Upanishads, and the *Gitā*—these three being authoritative on spiritual but not other matters—and wrote commentaries on them. The so-called *mahāvākyas* (profound maxims) such as *Tat twam asi* (Thou art that) and *Brahma satya jagat mithya* (Brahma alone is real, the world is not) were seen as statements of profound truth, products of mystical experiences, and self-certifying (*swatah pramāna*), and became the subject of much exegesis and debate.

Since one could not contradict the Vedas, the debate had a narrow textual orientation, sometimes centring on the 'true' meaning of a single word and rather stilted. That did not, however, stand in the way of interpretive ingenuity and disagreement. *Āchāryas* either genuinely read the texts differently or used them to legitimize views they had independently arrived at. In the latter case, the authority of the sacred texts was formally upheld but slyly subverted in practice. While at one level the Brahmanic debates sometimes appeared text-bound, exegetical, unadventurous, and even banal, they were also subtle and ingenious in their textual interpretations and ways of introducing novel ideas. That was why the tradition threw up several different schools, each claiming its authority and also pushing it in a different direction. In Indian philosophy, innovation was often done quietly, under the guise of exegesis, through commentaries rather than independent treatises.¹⁶ Although most of the important Indian philosophical classics took the form of commentaries on other works, they used the latter as

vehicles to further their own views and were creative works in their own right.

Victory in the debate required the disputants to be fully familiar with each other's position. Sometimes the rules of the debate themselves required each disputant to begin with a brief statement of his opponent's position (*anuvāda*) that the latter found acceptable. Many followers of each school therefore made it a point to master not only the doctrines of their own school but also those of their rivals, sometimes by even studying in their institutions. This meant that each knew what the other stood for, where they differed and why.¹⁷ They also appreciated that their opponents had what they considered to be good reasons to hold their views and were not wholly misguided. Since they understood their opponent's views in their own terms, they were even able to view them with some degree of sympathy. This often led to conscious and unconscious borrowing and the blurring of boundaries. Sankara was a good example of this. As he studied the Buddha's doctrines closely, he recognized the power of his thought and even called him *yoginām cakravartin*. Although he disagreed with and criticized some of his views, he was so deeply influenced by him that several commentators called him *pracchanna Baudha* (a crypto-Buddhist), and Vallabhacharya even accused him of being *antah pravishtachaur* (a thief who has entered one's house).¹⁸

Since Indian philosophy developed within the pervasive climate of public debate, it had a discursive and argumentative character, and many philosophical and even other kinds of works, including the *Sutrās* and *Kārikas*, were written in the form of a debate.¹⁹ Sometimes they begin with comprehensive statements and refutations of their opponents' positions before going on to outline their own. Patanjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, for example, raises a question, presents several alternative answers, critically evaluates them, and ends by giving his own view.²⁰ On other occasions, the opponents, though not explicitly mentioned, are implicit in the text and give it its structure and context. Commentaries on major schools, including those they reject, take great care to give faithful accounts of their systems of thought and present them in a manner their proponents would accept. In Mādhavāchārya's authoritative *Sarvadarsanasamgraha*, each chapter gives a faithful summary of a school followed by its critique in the later ones.²¹

Arrival of Islam

The arrival of Islam and the consolidation of Muslim rule from the thirteenth century onwards presented a powerful challenge to the Brahmanic hegemony. While foreign invasions were not new to India, the arrival of a powerful, militant, and universalist religion was. The Brahmanic elite initially identified Muslims in ethno-cultural rather than religious terms (as, for example, Turks rather than Muslims), an extension of the way they identified themselves, with the result that the doctrinal differences did not arouse their curiosity. The Muslim manner of invasion and the violence associated with it aroused fear and hostility that were hardly conducive to a dialogue. Hindu pandits resented their loss of traditional patronage and privilege, and some migrated to other parts of the country or turned to other professions. They also lost their public status and role, especially where temples were destroyed, and tended to withdraw from the cultural life of the country. Since the threat was common to all Hindu sects, they found it in their common interest to draw closer together and restrict their internal debates. Anxious to hold on to their volatile lower-caste followers, the Brahmanic leadership was more concerned to keep the society together by creating popular Hinduism than to debate with the new arrivals. It is striking that some of the Purānās composed during this period criticized Muslim morals, manners, dietary practices, and so on, all designed to warn off the Hindus, opened up their hitherto closed religion to the excluded castes, and offered other worldly rewards at a bargain price. For their part, the ulemas and the new rulers thought little of Hindu beliefs and social structure and had no interest in a dialogue either.

Over time, there was much intermingling between the two communities. Apart from the normal social and economic interactions, scores of Sufi saints and preachers who either came alone or with the conquering armies played a particularly important role. Driven by religious curiosity and the desire to convert, they settled in different parts of the country, established their seats (*takkias* or *khanqahs*) from which their different schools of thought (*silsila*) preached Islam. Initially hostile to Hindu beliefs and preachers, they later began to take a sympathetic interest in them and engaged in long discussions with Brahmins. They felt drawn to the mystic philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, pantheism, asceticism, symbolic representations of the divine and yoga, and devel-

oped a distinctly Indian brand of Islamic Sufism. The more liberal among them celebrated Hindu festivals, adopted local customs and traditions, even took Hindu names, and encouraged their followers to do the same.

This kind of openness and eclecticism worried the orthodox ulemas who dismissed it as heresy, declared those involved as 'no longer Muslims', gave a 'back to Sharia' call from time to time, and urged the rulers to stamp out such tendencies. While some rulers, especially those who were deeply devout or politically weak, obliged, others did not. They did not see closer social and cultural relations between Hindus and Muslims as a threat to Islam, rather they welcomed them as conducive to peace and order. While keeping the ulema in good humour by all kinds of rewards, they did not allow them to dictate or interfere with matters of policy that were largely guided by secular considerations of power, peace, and prosperity.

Some of the rulers were themselves curious about their subjects' beliefs, and conducted religious discourses with Brahmins and yogis (for whom they seem to have had particular fascination), a practice begun mainly during the Lodi period. Some Muslim rulers were also intrigued and attracted by the Jains, whose wealth contributed to the royal revenue and whose doctrines of non-violence, atheism, vegetarianism, concern for animals, and so on, presented quite a contrast to their own, and invited Jain monks to the royal court for discussions. Alladin Khilji had Āchārya Mahasena specially brought from Karnataka, and Muhammed-bin-Tughlaq had regular discussions with several Jain monks to the deep unease of the ulema. Although several Muslim rulers and scholars incorporated some Hindu or Jain beliefs and practices into Islam, this was largely limited to them and did not throw up new movements.

As for the Hindus, the Brahmin elite took little direct interest in Islam and did not for long translate the Qur'an into Sanskrit. By contrast, the lower castes responded to Islam far more positively, initially out of curiosity and later sympathy. Islam's ideas of equality and brotherhood, reinforced by the opportunities offered by the new rulers, appealed to them and led to conversion on a significant scale. The Brahmins could not remain indifferent and responded to this by suitably reinterpreting some of the major Hindu doctrines and practices and even incorporating into them some Islamic beliefs and practices. This led

to considerable intellectual churning and discussion within the Hindu community and threw up new philosophical and religious movements and sects, and over time the great Bhakti Movement. The latter had begun in south India earlier and drawn on the Hindu devotional tradition as articulated by Ramanuja, Mādhavāchārya, Nimbalker, and others. As it travelled north, the Bhakti Movement interacted with Islam and drew on its Sufi and other strands. Although it took several forms in different parts of India, they all stressed monotheism, love, equality, divine grace, a devotional path to salvation, good deeds, religious harmony, and a simple life. Since it freely drew on both Hindu and Islamic sources without pretending to offer their grand synthesis and used the vocabularies of both, it attracted and united large sections of both communities. The fact that it used vernacular languages and homely similes, mocked pomp and power, and reduced high philosophical principles to popularly accessible idioms gave it a cross-cultural universality that helped unite the multi-religious Indian society.

While there was thus much diffused and informal dialogue between the two communities on religious and other subjects during the Sultanate period and later, it rarely took the form of a probing public debate between their spokesmen on the central doctrines of their religion, especially those of the dominant Islam. The situation changed during the reign of Akbar, an illiterate but intellectually inquisitive and wise ruler, who took a relatively broadminded view of his religion. He built Ibadat Khana at Fatehpur Sikri, initially to hold discussions between the representatives of various Muslim groups on doctrinal and policy matters, which he expanded later in 1578 to include Zoroastrians, Hindus, Jains, Christians, and occasionally Jews so that he could 'hear them and that each may determine which is the truest religion'.²² Although Islam has a long history of dialogue with other Abrahamic religions, such an example of a Muslim ruler's openness to other religions and willingness to subject Islam to a critical scrutiny seems to be unique to India and was perhaps influenced by, among other things, the long Indian tradition of inter-religious debate. Helped by the fact that Akbar had several Sanskrit texts translated into Persian, his religious assembly saw some kind of critical debate between the pandits and the ulemas on theological, political, and other subjects.

Akbar was fascinated by Christian missionaries who had begun to arrive in significant numbers in Goa and elsewhere.²³ The debates

between the Jesuits Acquaviva and Monserrate, on the one hand, and the mullahs, on the other, on the comparative merits of the Qur'an and the Bible were particularly noteworthy.²⁴ The former generally won because they had taken the trouble to translate and study the Qu'ran, whereas the mullahs had no knowledge of even the most basic Christian principles until Akbar got Abdul Faizal to translate the Bible. In one extraordinary debate, a rationalist hakim challenged the spokesmen of all religions including his own. In his view, the teachings of a true prophet should conform to reason and not command the taking of human life. Since all prophets failed one or both of these tests, their claim to prophethood was suspect. The hakim also argued that since the revealed religions contradicted each other, which ideally they should not, they lacked credibility. Moreover, each religion claimed that the others had failed to maintain the purity of the revealed truth. There was no reason to believe that the same could not be true of it as well, and hence its own claim to finality and infallibility must be rejected. It is reported that none of the religious spokesmen present had a convincing reply, and the hakim left the meeting claiming victory. Akbar himself believed that all religions contained 'some true knowledge', had 'sensible men' among their followers, advocated 'virtues', and deserved respect. His Din-i-ilahi, the religion he created, partly out of conviction and partly for political reasons, included doctrines and cardinal virtues derived from different religions including Hinduism.

Missionaries, Modernity, and Social Reform

The gradual consolidation of British rule subjected almost all aspects of Indian society to a critical, even hostile, gaze and led to intellectual contestations on various fronts. The knowledge systems underlying Indian astronomy, astrology, and medical sciences including the ways of understanding the human body and treating diseases became subjects of debate, as did the Indian tradition of writing history. The most extensive and vigorous public discussions were centred on Indian religious beliefs and social practices. Although Christian missionaries challenged both the Hindus and the Muslims, whose minds they found in a 'great state of agitation' and with whom they had been in polemical exchanges, they were less familiar with the Hindus, saw them as easy targets for conversion, and tended to concentrate their attack on them.

Hindus were involved in two closely related debates. The first was with the Christian missionaries and centred on their religious beliefs and social practices. The second, partly stimulated by the first, occurred among the Hindus themselves. For all kinds of reasons including the arrival of the modern liberal and egalitarian ideas, groups of Hindus had begun to challenge their traditional social and religious practices such as the ban on widow remarriage, child marriages, untouchability, the caste system, gender inequality, idol worship, and religious ritualism. This debate between the conservatives and the reformers deeply divided the Hindu society and was fiercer than the first.

The two debates were conducted alongside each other and sometimes had the same participants. Although they were generally carried on in print, there were also the more familiar face-to-face debates involving large participatory audiences and presided over by eminent persons, including in some cases the local ruler himself. Unlike the complacent conservatives, who had no interest in either debate and took part only when they had to, the Hindu reformers were active participants in both and found themselves under conflicting pressures. They agreed with the missionaries that some of their beliefs and practices needed to be reformed, but were defensive about others and, like the conservatives, reacted strongly when their society and religion were mocked and summarily dismissed. Not surprisingly, they sometimes presented different even contradictory faces in relation to their external and internal opponents.

Initially the Christian-Hindu dialogue had some element of a *tatvanirninisū* debate and aimed to ascertain the truth in each religion by means of an honest and sympathetic discussion. Given the colonial context and its confrontational ethos, it was, however, mainly a *vijigisū* debate in which each tried to score a victory over the other, and at times, it involved even *vitanda* or a dogmatic and unscrupulous attempt to demolish the opponent. Formal and informal debates between the missionaries and the pandits took place in several parts of the country such as Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras that were most exposed to the colonial influence, and Banaras, the main centre of Hindu learning. One such debate between the Jesuits and the pandits in Banaras commanded an audience of thousands, lasted several days, and raised issues that went to the heart of their respective religions.

In several of these debates, the missionaries asked the pandits whether they believed in one God or many, what their Bible was,

who their equivalent of Christ was, why they worshipped idols, their reasons for believing in rebirth, what moksha meant, and so on. The pandits, at least the best among them, put up a formidable defence, including, where necessary, questioning the questions themselves.²⁵ The question whether they believed in one God or many was incoherent and blasphemous—the former because it assumed without good reason that God was a person for, if he was defined as cosmic power or supreme intelligence, the question made as little sense as whether air or energy or consciousness was one or many; and the latter because it assumed that God could not be both one and many and thus reduced him to the limited proportions of the human mind, and also because it attributed quantitative predicates to God and made as little sense as asking whether he was short or tall, yellow or blue. As for the Hindu Bible, there was no good reason why God should exhaustively reveal his will in a single text rather than in different ones to suit different ages and circumstances. As for idol worship, Hindus did no such thing. They worshipped not idols but images or *murtis* (from *murt*, meaning to manifest), which were not themselves objects of worship but represented, symbolized, or manifested the divine; were merely a medium to reach out to the impersonal and quality-less God; and were to be found in all religions including Christianity. As for their equivalent of Christ, they did not see why God should send his 'son' or emissary instead of incarnating himself as he periodically did for the Hindus. Similar answers were given to the other questions. The missionaries were not persuaded and asked counter questions to which the pandits replied, and the debate continued until it reached its inconclusive end.

For their part, the pandits asked quite a few searching questions of their own. Why did God send his son, and that a bachelor, rather than come down himself, live like a human being, and show by example how human beings should lead righteous lives and deal with the problems and dilemmas that life constantly throws up? If God created the universe, what existed before, or was this his first creation? Since God was omniscient, he would have known what Adam and Eve were going to do. Why then did he not endow them with the ability to resist temptations and follow his command? Why was Jesus unable to inspire faith and loyalty in Judas? And did this not show that his character and message were imperfect? Why did God allow Jesus to suffer excruciating pain on the cross? Either he was powerless to stop it or was wanting in love, and in both cases, he lacked the basic attributes of God. How can

one man atone and die for others, and thus deny personal responsibility as emphasized by the doctrine of vicarious atonement and Christ's redemptive suffering? Why are human beings judged and sent to eternal damnation on the basis of one life alone rather than given a second chance, indeed several chances, in a matter of such great importance, as justice requires and is implicit in the Hindu doctrine of rebirth?²⁶ Trinitarianism, which resembled but also differed radically from the Hindu trinity, too worried the pandits as did the Christian complicity in wars and colonial violence. The answers of missionaries to these and other related questions did not generally satisfy the pandits, and the debate after proceeding for a while ended inconclusively.²⁷

The debate between the two bore some resemblance to but also differed greatly from that between the Brahmins, on the one hand, and the Buddhists, the Jains, and other 'heterodox' schools, on the other, several centuries earlier. In the latter case, the participants shared a broadly common approach to dharma as well as such doctrines as karma and rebirth. Since the missionaries and the pandits disagreed on fundamental matters such as the nature of God, revelation, salvation, the nature and place of religion in social life, and what *pramāṇas* to invoke to validate their knowledge claims, their debates were more intractable and complex. They appealed to internal coherence, consistency of argument, absence of contradiction, common sense, and certain universal moral principles, and that worked up to a point. Beyond that, each side largely approached the other from within its own framework and asked questions and judged answers in terms of it. Since that made little sense to its opponent, large areas of incomprehension remained.

The fact that their debates were inconclusive and marked by passages of incomprehension unsettled the missionaries who claimed to be in possession of the divinely revealed truths and could not understand why the 'obtuse' and 'perverse' Hindus persisted with their false beliefs and superstitions. They did not have the same effect on the latter for whom truth was perceived differently from different perspectives, a debate need not always result in a victory for either side, and its point sometimes was to understand better why others held the views they did. With all its limitations, the debate between the two served several important purposes. It helped each understand the other better including where and why they differed and why these differences were beyond a certain point irresolvable. It also encouraged each side to

rethink its beliefs and practices in the light of the other's criticisms, and generated valuable internal debates and even movements for change, especially among the Hindus who had much to change and took a pluralist view of religious truth. While the debate made the Hindus aware of their deficiencies, it also increased their self-confidence as they were able to both offer a robust defence of many of their beliefs and expose the difficulties and contradictions of the Christian. The increased self-confidence made them more willing to borrow what they found valuable in, and thereby rise above, Christianity and gave rise to what is clumsily called neo-Hinduism (why not neo-Christianity or neo-Islam?). Paradoxically, the debate thus made them both proud and self-critical, eager to teach and ready to learn from others—a fascinating although unstable blend that has characterized reformist Hinduism ever since.

The internal debate in the Hindu society between conservatives and reformers was rather different in nature. It aroused greater passions, was more heated and aggressive, was often conducted in formal settings, lasted longer, and attracted much greater and more active public participation. Unlike that with the missionaries, it also sought a definite outcome and could not be inconclusive. The disputants shared a common cultural tradition and knew what the rules of the debate required of them. Since the debate involved an appeal to the *śāstras*, it was dominated by Brahmins in a way that the other debate was not.

The conservative–reformer debate, arising from the internal churning within the Hindu society or triggered by high-profile court cases, covered a spectrum. Sometimes it was concerned with seeking the truth or the right understanding of the subject and was a cooperative inquiry. More often, it was of the *vijigisu* type, usually conducted by fair means, as *vāda* should be, but just as often taking the form of *vitanda*. Some examples taken from different parts of the country illustrate their variety. Ram Mohun Roy was involved in several debates with orthodox Brahmins on social and religious issues both in print and face-to-face disputation. In one of them, held in 1816, Subrahmanya Shastri challenged him to a 'polemical combat' before a distinguished gathering that included Roy's own followers as well as his critics. The debate, in which the scriptures and the *Dharmashāstras* were generously quoted and discussed, lasted for several days. Roy was judged the winner because of 'the great cogency of his reasoning as well as

the large array of scriptural authorities' he was able to cite in support of his views.²⁸ The debates between Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and the orthodox Brahmins on the prohibition of widow remarriage were equally civil and followed a similar pattern. Although their victories did not end the practices involved, they had a great impact on public opinion.

Dayananda Saraswati, a great reformer, frequently challenged his critics to public debates and trained *updeshaks* who, like the old *vādins*, travelled to different parts of the country propagating his views and debating with their opponents.²⁹ His debate with the followers of Vallabhacharya in the Framji Cowasji Hall in Mumbai in June 1875 was fairly typical of the structure and ambience of such debates. Dayananda successfully demanded an equal right to question and reply to his opponent, and an equal representation of his followers in the audience. It was also agreed that the debate would continue until its central issue was settled and that the losing side would become the follower of the winner. The chairman and the two disputants sat on the stage and just below them were *shastris* who took detailed notes of their arguments. At the centre of the stage was a pile of over 150 books including the Vedas, the Upanishads, the *Brāhamanas*, the *Sutrās*, and various other *shāstras*. The disputants cited relevant *shlokas* and passages, challenged each other's interpretations of them, raised highly technical points of grammar and style, and used many a familiar logical trick. As the debate was reaching a climax and Dayananda's opponents feared defeat, they turned unruly, and it had to be ended. Later they or their associates were reported to have tried to poison him by bribing his cook and, when that failed, to assault him unsuccessfully when asleep.

The debate between Dayananda and the pandits of Banaras on 12 November 1869 on the vexed question of whether idol worship was sanctioned by the Vedas had taken a somewhat different form. Attended by thousands of people—one estimate puts the figure at 50,000—it was chaired by the local maharaja.³⁰ As the debate involved *shāstrārtha*, Dayananda asked his opponents to cite a Vedic verse supporting idol worship. Since they could not produce one, they raised the larger question of what *Vedaviruddha* meant (against the Vedas). Pandit Taracharan asked if it meant not mentioned in the Vedas or explicitly against them. Dayananda said the former, to which the pandit responded by asking where, in which verse, the Vedas had introduced

the idea of Vedaviruddha and defined it so broadly. He added further that nowhere did the Vedas say, or could say, that the *Smritis* and the *Purānās* that came much later had no authority of their own, and that it was these texts that sanctioned idol worship. As Dayananda replied to these points and was about to win the debate, his nervous opponents resorted to familiar tactics. When he was reading some textual material they had given him, they abruptly terminated the debate shouting 'defeated, defeated' and put up posters to that effect throughout the city. The enraged crowd pelted stones at Dayananda and his followers, and the police had to intervene.

Another debate between the reformer Narmad and Jadunath Maharaj on widow remarriage was by mutual agreement meant to be a *vāda* and conducted according to classical rules requiring both a rational defence of one's position and a conclusive refutation of the opponent's. Since the subject aroused considerable feeling and there was a strong likelihood of disturbance by Jadunath's unscrupulous followers, the face-to-face debate had to be called off, and it was carried on instead through passionately argued handbills and pamphlets. Although this did not allow anyone to be declared a winner and claim the authority of the *śāstras*, the public became fully acquainted with the reformers' arguments and felt sympathetic to them. The repeated threats of disruption and violence on this occasion as well as others further discredited the conservatives and helped the reformist cause.

In their debates with the reformers, the conservatives appealed to the authority of the *śāstras*. Reformers adopted two strategies. Some stepped outside that discursive framework and appealed to independent reason, universal moral principles, undesirable consequences of following the disputed practice, and so on. Others argued from within it but sought to subvert it or turn it to their advantage through ingenious hermeneutic and other devices. Of the two, the former was generally less effective both because independent reason and universal moral values were themselves subject to dispute, and because they carried little authority with the orthodox elite and masses for whom that of the *śāstras* was final and unchallengeable. Most successful reformers, some of whom had a soft spot for the *śāstras* anyway, adopted the second strategy and engaged in *śāstrārtha*.

Śāstrārtha was not easy. Although the *śāstras* had played a part in the traditional Hindu discussions of legal and social questions, they

were never as important as the colonial rule made them. Local customs and practices (*deshāchar*) often mattered far more and were binding even when they went against the *shāstras*. The formal disputations on the *shāstras* therefore had only a limited practical purchase and the parties involved knew this. Furthermore, there was no consensus on what texts formed part of the *shāstras* beyond the Vedas and the philosophical and ritualist literature associated with them. Some included the two epics; while others, even the Purānās. With the exception of the Vedas, there was also much disagreement on the relative authority of the various *shāstras* and their place in the scriptural hierarchy. When different texts took different views of the disputed practice, as they sometimes did, the debate reached an impasse and either ended or moved to a different terrain.

In their debates with the reformers, the conservatives took a literalist view of the *shāstras*, relying sometimes on isolated sentences, verses, or examples. The reformers responded in several ways. They questioned conservative interpretations of relevant verses and argued that the latter did not mean what their opponents took them to mean. When that did not work, as was often the case, they insisted that one should consider the totality of the text and its overall 'spirit' or central principles. Some advocated *arthavād* or looking at the reasons given for a particular practice and argued that when applied to the current circumstances, they required it to be abandoned. When that was inconclusive, they invoked the traditional notion of *loksangraha* respected by all *shāstras*, according to which the stability and prosperity of society was the highest value and any practice that stood in its way deserved to be changed. In some cases, the reformers genuinely believed that the *shāstras* supported their view. In others, they arrived at their view independently, read it in the texts, and claimed their authority. As one would expect, the reformers won some debates and lost or drew others. Although the reform of the Hindu society obviously depended on large political and economic forces, the debates facilitated it by building a consensus around it and explaining to the Hindu masses why it was necessary.

Political Discourse

The British rule introduced India to modernity with its distinct manner of understanding and organizing individual and social life. As India

fought initially to secure greater representative democracy within the framework of colonial rule and later for independence, it faced questions that were either wholly new to it or familiar but were now raised in a very different context. The questions and the debates they generated were primarily political in nature and related to such issues as the nature and critique of colonial rule, the basis and forms of political representation, nationalism, the nature and role of the modern state, equality, social justice, and individual and minority rights.³¹

In order to deal with these questions, Indian thinkers needed to master the language of modern politics including its style of debate, which they did in varying degrees, put to different uses, and gave rise to different forms of political discourse. Modernists drew their inspiration primarily from the writings of Locke, Bentham, Comte, J.S. Mill, Marx, Herbert Spencer, and others, as well as from European history, ideals, institutions, and practices. Their ranks included such men as Pherozeshah Mehta, Dadabhai Naoroji, G.K. Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee, Motilal Nehru, and Jawaharlal Nehru. Modernists either had limited knowledge of traditional Indian thought or took a dim view of it, or valued its cultural and moral, but not social and political, achievements. By and large, their ideas were derivative and lacked originality.

Unlike the modernists, critical traditionalists who drew their inspiration from both Western and traditional Indian thought developed a highly complex mode of discourse. They could not ignore the former both because it offered important insights into the new political reality that the colonial rulers had introduced in India and because only its ideas and language were intelligible to the colonial masters. Critical traditionalists drew on the traditional Indian thought not merely as a matter of national pride but also for other reasons. It seemed to them to contain insights lacking in Western thought, was alone intelligible to the masses whom they were increasingly mobilizing in their struggle against the colonial rule, countered the hold of anti-modern conservatives, and helped create a common space between Indians of modernist, conservative, and other persuasions. The ranks of the critical traditionalists included some of the country's most influential religious and cultural thinkers such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose, and Mahatma Gandhi.

Drawing on different schools of Indian philosophy, usually the Vedanta, and Indian historical experiences, critical traditionalists

developed new ways of defining and grounding the ideas of nation, nationalism, national independence, representation, the state, the individual, freedom, equality, and the common good. They developed a new language of discourse in which old and long familiar words were revived, given new meanings, and adopted to modern concerns. They talked of *swarāj* rather than liberty, freedom, or independence; *nyāya* rather than justice; *adhikār* rather than right; *vikās* rather than development; *sanskṛiti* rather than civilization. These were not vernacular translations of English words, though that too happened when Western ideas were discussed in local languages. Rather, they had indigenous cultural roots and history, and their cognitive and emotional connotations differed from those of their 'corresponding' Western concepts. Gandhi called them 'vital', rich in meaning, and understood by the masses, and thought it a 'sacrilege' to replace them with 'foreign importation of doubtful value'.³² *Swarāj* (literally self-rule), meaning rule by the self over the self, connotes absence of external constraints as the terms 'liberty' and 'freedom' do, but it also connotes self-discipline, inner harmony, and integration, which the latter do not. Again, *adhikār* connotes a claim on others as 'a right' does, but it also implies that the claim is deserved, derived from one's social status, virtues, or way of life, and hence it is not within the power of the state to deny or grant.

In addition to the modernist and critical traditionalist, other forms of discourse too sprang up, of which that developed by the Dalits and more generally by the long oppressed lower castes was the most vocal and articulate.³³ Its spokesmen such as Jotiba Phule, Narayana Guru, Ramaswamy Naicker, Jyothea Thess, and B.R. Ambedkar had little sympathy with much of the traditional Indian thought because of its casteism, hierarchical orientation, complacency, lack of concern for the poor, and religiosity. They largely relied on Western ideas and ideals to provide the critical tools and were close to modernists. Although derivative and not very original in this sense, their thought was creative in two important respects. First, it gave a radical orientation to Western thought and a unique moral depth to its central concepts. It defined equality to mean not only equality of rights, status, and opportunities but also respect, life chances and an egalitarian social and economic order. It gave the idea of fraternity a pride of place it never had in the mainstream European and even the French revolutionary discourse, made it central to political thought and practice, and defined it widely to mean mutual

concern and collective solidarity. It did the same with other concepts such as patriotism, freedom, common good, the rule of law, and violence. By and large, it either took over and gave new meanings to the Western political vocabulary or replaced it with a home-grown one.

Second, the Dalit spokesmen insisted that their predicament was too horrendous and tragic to be expressed in the prosaic and seductively reassuring liberal language of rights and values, and that it required a negative and evocative language of condemnation. The fact that the higher castes systematically humiliated, degraded, and dehumanized the lower castes and treated them as worse than animals was poorly described by saying that they violated their dignity, treated them unequally, or denied them justice. Such a language conveyed no anger, showed no passion, levelled no accusation, evoked no haunting images, and, what was just as important, confined the moral imagination within the limits of the prevailing liberal discourse. The Dalit discourse evolved a new vocabulary of such brutally uncompromising terms as Dalit (the crushed), broken men, *bahishkrut* Bharat (ostracized India), servile classes, and *gulamgiri* (a condition of systematic enslavement).

In their different ways, these and other modes of discourse laid the foundations of the modern Indian political discourse with all its internal variety and heterogeneity.³⁴ Its multilingual composition has been a source of both its strengths and weaknesses. Since no discursive framework has the field to itself, each knows that there are other ways of conceptualizing and describing the subject matter. This encourages it to critically reflect on itself and benefit from the insights offered by others. Thus some Indian thinkers have redefined the idea of rights to incorporate the insights offered by the idea of *adhikār*, especially its core contention that rights have a moral basis, are not entirely dependent on the goodwill of the state, and involve responsibility. Similarly, the idea of freedom is widely redefined in the light of that of *swarāj*, which emphasizes the importance of self-discipline and inner harmony. Thanks to its multilingualism, the Indian political discourse has an ongoing dialogue built into its very structure, and it is open, self-critical, and not in the grip of one particular mode of thought. Its limitations lie in the fact that the participants sometimes talk past each other, give different meanings to the same terms, fail to formulate their differences in a mutually intelligible common language, or think that they disagree in their substantive views simply because they use different vocabularies.

Although it is rich and varied, the Indian political discourse has not been as probing and self-critical as it needs to be, and it sometimes remains trapped in the colonial conceptual framework. The latter has grown out of and is deeply shaped by Western experiences and modes of thought, and it runs the constant risk of misdescribing and misinterpreting Indian reality and generating misleading questions and controversies, a danger to which neither the modernists nor the Dalit theorists, and not even the critical traditionalists, have been fully alert. To take an example, the term 'religion' was and is still widely used by Indian and Western writers to refer to 'Hinduism', 'Buddhism', and 'Jainism'. It is generally defined in the Western discourse in the context of Abrahamic faiths and is taken to involve a creator God, a prophet, or his equivalent and the scriptures revealing the divine will. Since the three Indian *dhārmic* traditions do not meet these requirements, a confused and confusing debate arises about whether they are religions properly so called and, alarmingly, how they can be turned into one. The Hindu *dhārmic* tradition or what is called Hinduism has suffered the most. The term 'Hinduism' implies that it consists of certain religious beliefs and practices and that a Hindu is one who subscribes to them. This absurdly turns a Hindu into a Hinduist and ignores the basic fact that 'Hinduism' includes a wide variety of systems of belief to any one of which a Hindu might subscribe. The strange Western practice of turning almost every non-Abrahamic religion into an 'ism' requires a closer analysis than it has received so far.

In the political context, the confusion is even greater. Secularism is a good example of this. In the Western context where it originates, it refers to a particular way of relating the state and religion. As we saw, the term 'religion' makes only a limited sense in the Indian context. Furthermore, Christianity, which is at the heart of the Western debate on secularism, has an organizational structure that none of the major Indian 'religions' has. Unlike Christianity, which is not committed to a particular social structure, Indian 'religions', especially the Hindu, are deeply bound up with social practices, and the state cannot avoid taking a keen and active interest in them and banning those that are unacceptable. For these and other reasons, such ideas as 'the wall of separation' and 'laicite' have little relevance in the Indian context. It is hardly surprising that the Indian debate on secularism is sometimes confusing and disconnected from the Indian reality.

Modern Western political discourse has traditionally been and to a large extent still is conducted in terms of clearly defined ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, conservatism, communism, and fascism, each representing a reasonably coherent body of interrelated beliefs. It is common to define one's political identity in terms of them and defend one's views and actions accordingly. In calling oneself a liberal or a socialist, one expresses one's commitment to a set of political principles that guide one's choices and give them an internal consistency. For several reasons, this way of thinking did not take roots in India. The Indian, and especially the dominant Hindu culture, stresses practices rather than beliefs and takes a largely instrumental and eclectic view of the latter. It allows, even encourages, mutual borrowing between different schools of thought, sees boundaries as relatively porous, and rules out the kind of closure that a modern ideology presupposes. It holds further that different areas of life have different logics and that the same body of principles cannot govern all. Since one can, indeed should, be 'conservative' in one area of life but 'liberal' in some other, it is wrong to aim to be a conservative or liberal *sans phrase*. Apart from the communists, and often not even they, few Indians define themselves and their opponents in terms of clearly defined political ideologies and base their choices and actions on them. Since Indian political discourse does not have an ideological basis or orientation, it does not have doctrinal sharpness. This encourages flexibility, openness of thought, spirit of compromise, but it can also lead to weak convictions, denial of deep and genuine differences, unprincipled conduct, and lazy fudges.

Thanks to the profound churning during the struggle for independence and the wide variety of views it threw up, the Indian Independence struggle was marked by great debates. No single view became so dominant as to drive out others and acquire a hegemonic status. Even though Gandhi was a commanding political presence from the early 1920s onwards and was sacralized (*mahatma*) and seen as head of the national family (*bapu*), neither his ideas nor his actions went unchallenged. Indeed the greater his hold over his countrymen, the greater was the scrutiny to which they were subjected. He was at the centre of seven major debates, which between them represented the most influential currents of thought—namely, Hindu nationalists, orthodox Brahmins, modernists, socialists, Jinnah, Tagore, and

Ambedkar. These and other debates clarified views, brought out their shared assumptions, and helped reduce their differences to a manageable range.

These views were reflected in the Constituent Assembly whose debates exemplify the emerging Indian style of political deliberation.³⁵ Although the Assembly was formally in charge of drafting the Constitution, the rest of the country was not a silent spectator. Minority communities, professional associations, chambers of commerce and industry, private companies, political parties, and language associations made their views known to it. Thousands of individuals wrote to it on issues of great importance to them, such as language, fundamental rights, and minority protection. Newspapers and political and legal journals commented on the various provisions of the draft Constitution as well as on the views expressed in the Assembly. Its secretariat acknowledged all submissions and frequently summarized them for the Drafting Committee or the Assembly leaders. Although the Constitution was not put to a national referendum as in South Africa and subjected to a detailed public scrutiny, the debate in the country at large had an impact on it.

Debates in the Constituent Assembly were conducted in the spirit of *samvād* or *samay vādah*, non-adversarial collective deliberation. Although the Congress was in an overwhelming majority, it went out of its way to bring in outsiders including its critics. The fact that it was a national movement, an umbrella organization, and not yet a political party helped. There were few sharp ideological divides and differences in the Assembly and hardly anyone spoke from within or justified their views in terms of a particular political ideology. The debates centred on specific issues and aimed at the best ways of dealing with them in the light of certain broadly shared objectives such as national security, equality, regional diversity, and public order. It is striking that the Preamble, which lays down the guiding principles of the Constitution, was drafted at the end and not the beginning of the Constitution-making process. It is worth noting too that the debates were conducted in largely secular terms and hardly any Hindu nationalist, of whom there were quite a few, invoked the scriptures to demand or even justify particular policies.

Unlike many of its counterparts elsewhere, the Constituent Assembly placed enormous emphasis on consensus on important matters. Only

such a decision was supposed to carry moral authority, ensure voluntary compliance, and to be in harmony with the Indian tradition as reflected in the way old panchayats were believed to reach their decisions. Nehru repeatedly insisted that the Constitution should be framed with as 'great a respect for unanimity as possible'.³⁶ President Prasad would postpone a debate so that a consensus could be reached through informal discussions outside the chamber. Rather than move quickly to a decision, discussions would sometimes continue for a very long time in the hope that an agreement acceptable to all would be found. Whips were rarely used in the Assembly and were limited to occasions when party discipline was crucial. The question of official or national language, for example, was deeply divisive, and was debated off and on for nearly three years before its members could all agree on a formula acceptable to most of them and to the country at large. The federal structure of India, another controversial issue, was debated for just over two years, and, like many other issues, it was discussed not in terms of what a 'true' federation should look like or what foreign model of it should be adopted but rather how best to distribute powers between the Centre and the states so that such objectives as national unity, regional aspirations, and easy cooperation between the two levels of government could be secured. A comparison of the Indian Constituent Assembly debates with those in France in 1789 and in Philadelphia in 1787 brings out their distinctive character.

When a consensus was not possible, the Assembly sought a compromise or resorted to deliberate ambiguity. For example, India was to be a republic but would recognize the British monarch as the head of the Commonwealth. Hindi was to draw 'primarily' on Sanskrit for its vocabulary but also assimilate the 'forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani', and stay true to the 'composite culture' of the country. The state was to respect minority personal laws but also 'endeavour to secure' a uniform civil code. Many members of the Assembly were not in favour of prohibiting cow slaughter but went along with the vociferous minority in asking the state to 'endeavour' to do so. Hindi was to be the official language, but English was to continue to play that role for 15 years, at the end of which a parliamentary committee was to examine the issue.

The Assembly's approach to disagreement, which was characteristic of much of the Indian political life in general, had its virtues and

weaknesses. When disagreements were deep and divisive and emotions running high, or the political climate was hostile, it was sometimes wise to leave the matter undecided or to gesture in both directions in the hope that the ordinary process of democratic politics would narrow the distance, or to state the long-term goal and satisfy one group but not to take any steps in that direction and thereby reassuring its opponent. The Assembly, however, did not stop there. Sometimes it avoided taking hard decisions even when they were necessary and stored up trouble for the future as in the case of secularism, the civil code, and some provisions of directive principles; on some other occasions, it gave in to vociferous but unwise demands and sought accommodation at the cost of coherence as in the case of official language and caste-based reservations; on yet other occasions, it avoided debate and allowed unpopular decisions to be taken by stealth, as with the national anthem and regional autonomy.

One important and largely neglected feature of the Constitution that shows the limits of the consensus is worth noticing. Although the Indian political discourse included the modernist, critical traditionalist, and Dalit strands, all of which were represented in the Constituent Assembly, the Constitution is basically a modernist document in its central concerns, conceptual framework, and design of the state. Dalit interests are catered for through such things as reservations, abolition of untouchability, and temple entry, but their vision of India including their views on the nature and functions of the state and the new social and economic order find no place in the Constitution as Ambedker himself admitted later. This is even more true of the critical traditionalist voice, to which an occasional obeisance is paid but whose categories, vocabulary, and concern to embed the state in Indian civilization are largely ignored.

This happened partly because the Assembly was dominated by the modernists and partly because the central concerns of the other two discourses, especially the critical traditionalist, were not adequately articulated in legal and institutional terms that the Constitution required. To talk of *adhikār* or *swarāj* is fine, but how does one express them in legal terms and what institutional forms do they require? The critical traditionalists whose attention was largely focused on moral, social, and cultural issues had not done the necessary conceptual and institutional work that could be canvassed and debated in the Assembly.

The fact that the Constitution is a modernist document and marginalizes other discourses partly explains why some groups of Indians, while lauding many of its provisions and even being proud of it, continue to complain from time to time that it is 'culturally strange' and 'not quite Indian'.



The long Indian tradition of public debate has served the country well. Thanks to it, Indians see differences of views as a normal and legitimate part of human life, and do not feel threatened by them or regard them as indicative of intellectual obtuseness or moral perversity. As the popular adage puts it, *munde munde matirbhinnā* (different heads mean different opinions). Although the tradition has a tendency to relativize and freeze differences, it recognizes that they can be debated and resolved, minimized, or better understood. As a classical maxim puts it, *vāde vāde jāyate tattvabodhah* (truth is discovered and assimilated or realized by debate and discussion). The tradition repeatedly warns against getting too deeply committed to one's views and urges an attitude of relative detachment. While this discourages strong convictions, it also fosters openness and guards against self-righteousness and fanaticism. Since it holds that truth is many-sided and perceived differently from different perspectives, a point frequently made by Aśoka, Akbar, the Sufis, and more recently by Gandhi, it is suspicious of all claims to absolute and final truth and is replete with examples where such claims are exposed. In the *Gītā*, even Krishna calls his views 'my opinion' or 'my belief' (*me matih* or *me matah*) rather than final revealed or absolute truths and leaves Arjuna free to do what he thinks right (*yathechhasi tathā kuru*).³⁷ The fact that he ends up doing what Krishna wants him to do (*karishye vachanam tava*) could be seen as uncritical obedience but also, given his earlier refusal to fight, as an exercise of independent judgement. Since these and related beliefs and sensibilities lie at the basis of a democratic way of life, the Indian tradition of public debate deserves credit for the country's ability to sustain it for over six decades.

CHOOSING THE NATIONAL SYMBOLS OF INDIA

Politics is an art of unification; from many it makes one. And symbolic activity is perhaps our most important means of bringing things together, both intellectually and emotionally.

—Michael Walzer

Human life is constituted through, and is unimaginable without, symbols.¹ They make present what is absent, accessible what is distant, vivid what is only dimly grasped, and give shape and structure to what is fluid and indeterminate. The more impersonal, distant, diffused, or complex an entity or area of human life as is, for example, the case with religion and the political community, the greater is the role and power of symbols.

A political community includes millions whom one never meets or cares for but for whose sake one is expected to pay taxes and sometimes even lay down one's life. It encompasses the dead and the unborn, and depends on a strong and often unarticulated sense of intergenerational obligation to maintain its historical continuity. It is hardly surprising that every modern and even premodern political community is suffused with symbols, gives them a quasi-sacred status, and relies on them to evoke appropriate sentiments and foster a sense of common belonging among its members. Political symbols are modes of collective self-expression, and reflect the way in which a community imagines and defines itself. They are descriptive as well as aspirational, presenting

a particular image of what the country is and wishes to be. They are also both cognitive and affective, providing a conceptual framework to interpret the country and arousing powerful emotions that sometimes transcend disagreements over their interpretations.

The architects of independent India articulated their view of the country in various documents, especially the Constitution, as well as their choice of symbols. The latter include such things as the national flag, the national anthem, the national emblem, the national motto, the system of state honours, and, in the extended sense of the term, the name of the country. In this chapter, I examine these symbols and ask three questions. First, since there were alternatives in the case of each of these symbols and a choice had to be made, why did the founding fathers and mothers of the Indian republic make the choices they did? Second, since the choice of symbols is never free of disagreement, and it certainly was not in India, what kind of disagreement occurred in each case, how was it debated and resolved, and what was done with the alternatives that did not find favour? Third, what do these symbols tell us about the views of the architects of modern India on the kind of country it was and should aim to be?

To avoid misunderstanding, three points of clarification are in order. First, the choice of symbols did not take place in a historical vacuum as many of them had emerged during the course of India's struggle for independence. Some, such as the national flag, enjoyed consensual legitimacy; in other cases, such as the national anthem and the name of the country, their comparative status was in dispute. Except a few symbols that were wholly new, independent India had to choose between the existing alternatives. The alternatives, further, had the weight of history and tradition behind them, and those making the choices were themselves part of and shaped by that history. The choices therefore were not and could not be entirely 'free' or a matter of abstract rational assessment.

Second, some symbols were debated and chosen by the Constituent Assembly either because they were considered to be of the greatest significance or because they provoked deep disagreement. Others were chosen by the government of the day. The symbols thus have different statuses, rest on different kinds of authority, and should not be homogenized.

Third, in some cases, we do not have a full account of the reasons for choosing particular symbols. When Nehru himself seems to have

made the choice, he has left no record of his reasons for doing so. When the Constituent Assembly made the choice, we know its reasons, but they were not always fully stated and sometimes do not seem to be the real reasons. Its Congress party members generally discussed the matter beforehand and reached an agreement, but either no record of their discussions seems to have been kept or those who should know have no idea where it could be found.² We therefore have to rely on the newspaper reports of the day and those few Congress members of the Assembly who openly disagreed with their party on the floor of the House or wrote about it afterwards. Further research in this important area is badly needed and, until it is done, all work on it remains tentative.

'India That is Bharat'

In the Constituent Assembly debates, H.V. Kamath said that the country needed '*nāmakaran*' and wondered about the 'proper name which should be given to the new baby of the Indian republic'.³ Although it was called by various names such as India, Hind, Hindustan, and Bharat at Independence, Article 1 of the draft Constitution submitted to the Constituent Assembly for discussion read: 'India shall be a union of states'.⁴ For the Drafting Committee and those who influenced it, this was to be the country's official name. Several members of the Assembly took a strong objection to it and put down amendments proposing other names, the most popular being 'Bharat'.⁵ Shibban Lal Saksena's amendment said that '[t]he name of the country shall be Bharat', and it was supported by Maulana Nasrat Mahani. Anantsaynam Iyenger's amendment stated that '[f]or the word India Bharat should be substituted'. Lokanath Misra's amendment wanted the word 'India' to be replaced by 'Bharatvarsha'.⁶ The amendments came up for discussion on 15 November 1948 but were deferred until 17 September 1949, when there was a strong support for naming the country 'Bharat'. It is worth noting that during the intervening months, Congress party members of the Constituent Assembly had met independently and resolved that India should be known by its 'ancient name' of Bharat.⁷

In the Constituent Assembly and elsewhere, several closely related reasons were given for calling the country 'Bharat'. It was 'our name' in the sense that it was given by the Indians not foreigners as in the case

of Hind, Hindustan, or India. It was in 'our language' and was not of foreign origin. It had been in circulation for centuries, even millennia, and represented historical continuity. It referred to a territory and the people living within it, and it had no narrow racial and religious connotation as the word 'Hindustan' had. Now that India was at last free to decide its name, these and other considerations dictated that it should choose one that connected with its past, resonated with its collective memory, and was indigenous in its origin.⁸

Several influential members of the Constituent Assembly were not persuaded by these arguments and objected to the amendments substituting the word 'Bharat' or its derivatives for 'India'. Speaking for most of them, Ambedkar argued that the name 'India' had many advantages. It was how the country was internationally known and recognized by the United Nations. This was also the name under which it had signed international agreements and treaties. It was widely used during the British rule and implied continuity with the country's immediate past. Although Ambedkar, Nehru, and others sharing their views did not explicitly say so, they seem to have thought that since 'India' was in English, it was not associated with a particular linguistic or religious community. Unlike 'Bharat', it was culturally and religiously neutral and, in that sense, even perhaps secular and likely to be acceptable to all. When the advocates of 'Bharat' said that it was 'our' name, in 'our' language, and part of 'our' history, they clearly had only the Hindus in mind and that reinforced the fears of their opponents. The fact that keeping the name 'India' meant continuity with the British Raj and made India a successor state to it with all the attendant advantages rather than a breakaway from it, which Pakistan represented, also weighed with Indian leaders. Jinnah had hoped that India would call itself 'Hindustan' analogously to Pakistan and was most upset when it decided not to.⁹ It was also not very common in those days for a newly independent country to change its name. Nehru thought Ireland was perhaps unique in calling itself 'Eire'.

The word 'Bharat' clearly had Hindu associations. The word and its derivatives such as Bhāratvarsha, Bhāratdesha, and Bhāratkhanda go back at least to the second century BCE. They were widely used in classical Sanskrit literature and acquired considerable currency in the Purānās.¹⁰ For the latter, Bharat was a holy land of the Hindus. It included their sacred rivers, mountains, and places of pilgrimage, and

was associated with a social structure based on the varna system, the Vedic sacrifices, and *dhārmic* rituals. The word 'Bharat' was widely used in post-Puranic Sanskrit and vernacular literature, and had ethnic and religious associations. Muslim rulers seem never to have used it and called India 'Hind' or 'Hindustan'.¹¹ British rulers called the country 'India', a derivative of 'Hind' whose origins went back to the ancient Greeks and which entered the English language in the fourteenth century. In either case, the word 'Bharat' was not part of the official discourse. Nor was it common among ordinary Hindus, being largely limited to the elite Brahmanic discourse. It entered the popular discourse and acquired political salience when a challenge was mounted to the colonial rule in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. It gained wider currency during the agitation against the partition of Bengal; was often used by Aurobindo, Tagore, Vivekananda, and others; and was closely tied up with the rise of Hindu self-consciousness. It was largely during this period that the term 'Bharat' with its ancient masculine associations was feminized and became popular as 'Bharat Mata' adorned with Hindu cultural symbols.

Although the word 'Bharat' entered the political rhetoric on the back of Hindu self-assertion, its meaning and reference had changed over time. It came to refer to all Indogenic or Indic traditions, not only the Vedic but also others such as Buddhism, Jainism, Lokayat, and Sikhism that had all grown up on the Indian soil and shared enough in common to form a single cultural family. Later, it was further broadened and referred not to an ethno-religious or cultural but a territorial unit that included all those communities that had settled in the territorial boundaries of India and made it their home. Their geographical origins did not matter as otherwise even the Vedic civilization created by the Aryans, who had come to India from outside could not form part of Bharat. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, tribals, and so on, were all Bharati, making Bharat a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and even a multi-civilizational country. Although 'Bharat' originally had Hindu associations and retained them in the eyes of many, successful attempts had been made to purge it of them and to define it in broader and relatively neutral terms. It had also become familiar to the masses and was widely used in popular discourse. The fact that it figured prominently in a national song that many wanted to make the country's national anthem was a further factor in its favour.

Given the strength of feeling in favour of the term 'Bharat' across the political and ideological divide and since it no longer carried the strong Hindu associations that it once did, the bulk of the Constituent Assembly members insisted that it should be the name of the country. For reasons mentioned earlier, there was also, however, a strong opinion in favour of calling the country 'India'. A compromise was reached, and Article 1 as amended by the Constituent Assembly read: 'India that is Bharat shall be a union of states'. Even this compromise did not satisfy all. In his speech in the Constituent Assembly on 24 November 1949, Mohammed Tahir of Bihar called it a 'hotch-potch sort of name' and quipped that if an Indian was from now on to be asked what his country was, he would have to say, 'I belong to India that is Bharat!' He thought it 'a matter of shame that the Constitution could not fix a name for the country'.¹² His was a lone voice. Most of his colleagues in the Assembly and many in the country at large approved of the dual designation.

The use of both 'India' and 'Bharat' was not unique to the Constitution. Tagore spoke of 'Bharat' in the Bengali version of 'Jana Gana Mana' but of 'India' in his English translation of it. He could have retained 'Bharat' in the latter as well but did not. Perhaps he assumed that 'India' was to be used when speaking English and 'Bharat' when speaking an Indian or Indogenic language, or that 'India' was appropriate when outsiders were involved and 'Bharat' when Indians talked among themselves. Since the Constitution of India assumes that 'Bharat' is unfamiliar to the outside world and needs to be introduced by linking it up with the more familiar 'India', it puts the latter first. This is probably why its authorized Hindi translation, which is largely meant for Indians, reverses the expression and talks of 'Bharat that is India' (*Bharat arthāt India rajyonkā sangh hogā*).

It would be wrong to suggest that the advocates of 'Bharat' came from the ranks of Hindu nationalists or those with strong Hindu sympathies and that those favouring 'India' were all modernists or an anglicized elite. Had that been the case, the Constituent Assembly would have been divided and not reached a unanimous decision. Although some preferred either name alone, many in each group appreciated the strength of the other's arguments and even felt the pull of their underlying sentiments. Those in favour of calling the country 'India' saw that there was also a case for calling it 'Bharat' because of its

familiarity to the masses of Indians, its historical and cultural roots, and reasons of national self-respect. Conversely, the advocates of 'Bharat' appreciated that there was a case for retaining the term 'India' because of its associations with the country's colonial past, its greater familiarity to the outside world and even perhaps to the Indians themselves, and the need to remind the country that the Partition had not undermined its continuity and created a wholly new entity requiring a new name, especially one evocative of its pre-Muslim past. 'India that is Bharat' reflected not only a political compromise but also a deeper consensus.¹³ It is worth noting that Saksena's amendment, which proposed the word 'Bharat', was seconded by a Muslim.

Since 'India' and 'Bharat' belong to different registers and have different cultural and historical associations, the expression 'India that is Bharat' contains a tension.¹⁴ Given its provenance and lingering Hindu associations, the term 'Bharat' encourages the belief that the Hindus and their culture lie at the heart of India, and the concomitant desire to 'Bharatize' India. It also, however, encourages the opposite tendency to Indianize Bharat—to urge the Hindus to stop claiming exclusive or at least primary ownership of the country and see it instead as a cherished home to all its communities. Post-Independence India reflects both these tendencies, and their dialectic, played out at the collective level as well as in the consciousness of many Indians, offers one way to understand the nature and complexity of its political life.

Although the Constitution formally endorsed two of the country's several names, others did not disappear from the popular and even official discourse. Until recently, all prime ministers ended their Independence Day addresses to the country with 'Jai Hind', as do many formal and informal public meetings. An army band plays Iqbal's 'Saare Jahan se Achchā Hindostan Hamara' at the annual Republic Day Parade. Many Indians, especially the older generation, find 'Bharat' contrived, official, and even bureaucratic, and prefer to call the country either 'Hindustan' without the slightest suggestion that they see it as a land of the Hindus or 'India' even when they have no competence in the English language. Even so far as the two official names of the country are concerned, ordinary people and government officials use one or the other depending on the historical associations these names have for them and which of them they wish to emphasize in a particular context.¹⁵ The names of a country have their histories, which define their usage and invest them

with particular cultural and emotional connotations. Governments can intervene in these histories and habituate people to new usages but only up to a point and over several generations.¹⁶

National Flag

Although a national flag for India was first proposed in 1833, it was not designed and hoisted until 1905.¹⁷ Initially it carried Hindu and Muslim religious symbols, such as eight white lotuses, a crescent, and a star, and was in three colours—red, saffron, and green representing Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims respectively. Later, it underwent minor changes at the hands of different groups. When Gandhi appeared on the scene and embarked on a programme of mass mobilization, he stressed the political and emotional significance of the flag and gave it the importance it never had before. He wanted the various religious symbols to be removed largely because they could be divisive. However, he too continued to think in terms of representing different religious communities on the flag and suggested that it should be in red and green to represent Hindus and Muslims respectively. He wanted the spinning wheel at the centre of the flag to symbolize such things as the dignity of manual labour, the plight of the poor, collective responsibility of all Indians to eradicate poverty, and the importance of traditional industry.¹⁸

Gandhi's proposal raised predictable difficulties. India included several kinds of communities, and there was no reason why the religions should be given greater importance. Even so far as the religious communities were concerned, India had several, and singling out just the two was bound to alienate others. It was also not clear how one particular colour could be taken to represent a community. While green had some significant association with Muslims and could be presented as 'their' colour, the same could not be said of the Hindus. They are not a homogeneous community, and the meanings of colours vary with sects and castes. Some of their influential leaders argued that not red but *gherua* (red ochre or deep saffron) was their representative colour.

Since the Sikhs and other religious communities objected to their exclusion, Gandhi proposed the addition of white to symbolize 'other religious communities' without explaining how this was so and why the same logic could not be extended to the two major communities as

well. Since the flag had three colours, the Sikhs asked why a fourth one could not be added to represent them. Some of them even refused to join the Civil Disobedience Movement unless the flag either included 'their' colour or was all in one colour. Some also objected to the charkha on the ground that it represented India in a bad light by stressing its poverty and symbolizing the rejection of modernity. However, since they were few in number and not influential, the charkha was largely non-controversial and only the colours of the flag remained the major stumbling block.¹⁹

Gandhi and the Congress were disturbed by the communalization of colours. Since they had chosen the colours precisely for that purpose and could not easily discard them, they began to insist that the colours should be seen as representing not particular communities but rather certain moral and spiritual values. The saffron was supposed to signify courage and sacrifice; the white, purity and truth; and the green, faith and relation to nature. It was not clear who was to decide what values each colour represented, why these values and not others were singled out for emphasis, and what their political relevance was. What was no less important, different colours had different meanings for and signified different values to different communities. Saffron, for example, did not signify anything, let alone courage and sacrifice to Muslims, though it did so to some groups of Hindus. While denying the colours communal significance, Gandhi and the Congress thus reintroduced it through the backdoor under the guise of the moral and spiritual values they allegedly represented.

The Congress appointed a seven-member committee to explore the matter further and make appropriate recommendations. It was chaired by Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya and included Pandit Nehru, Maulana Azad, and Vallabhbhai Patel. After widespread consultation based on a brief questionnaire, the committee recommended that the flag should be in one colour and that should be saffron—the former to avoid the controversy over colours and symbolize India's unity, and the latter for aesthetic and heraldic reasons, which, however, were never clearly explained and raised the suspicion that the real reason had to do with its Hindu associations, especially as the committee also said that saffron was more acceptable to Indians as a whole and was associated with this country by long tradition.²⁰ The fact that Nehru and Azad were members of the committee did not allay the suspicion.

Neither recommendation was acceptable to the Congress, let alone the minority communities. While many Sikhs and Hindus were sympathetic to saffron, Muslims dismissed it as the 'colour of the bandit Shivaji'. They did not mind a single colour so long as it was not saffron. Gandhi thought that although having only one colour on the flag was a good idea for reasons given by the committee, the desired unity had not yet been achieved.²¹ Since differences remained, it was better to recognize and accommodate them. He therefore wanted the old three colours to remain to represent and perpetuate the growing unity. This meant that the colours continued to retain their communal significance. Although Gandhi and the Congress were deeply unhappy about this, they saw no way out except to deny such a reading and to reiterate more earnestly than before that the colours 'really' represented certain moral and spiritual values. The Congress Working Committee gave this interpretation an official status by passing a resolution to the effect that saffron stood for courage and sacrifice; white, for peace and truth; and green, for faith and chivalry.

This was how the Poorna Swaraj flag was born in 1931, and it remained the Congress flag until Independence. At Independence, it was referred to the Constituent Assembly for approval, where Nehru commended it in a somewhat rambling speech. He revisited the symbolic significance of the colours, commented that they represented certain moral and spiritual values, and insisted that those who had designed the flag had 'no communal reference in mind'.²² As we saw, this was not true. What is worse, he contradicted himself when he went on to say that he and others who had designed it had hoped that 'in its combination and in its separate parts', it would represent the 'tradition of synthesis which has characterised us for thousands of years'. The idea of synthesis made little sense in relation to the abstract values the three colours were supposed to represent but perfect sense if they were taken to represent various religious communities and their harmonious relations.²³

A deliberate ambiguity lay at the heart of the flag. Different communities, especially the Hindus and the Muslims, believed and continue to believe that the saffron and the green represent them. This is officially denied but unofficially approved and sometimes even encouraged. As for the symbolic philosophical significance of the colours, the Constituent Assembly knew that the meanings of the colours could not

be officially prescribed and that, even if they could be, no agreement was possible among its members. Not surprisingly, everyone was and is left free to read the colours as they please.²⁴

The only change the Constituent Assembly introduced in the national flag was related to the charkha. It had been on the flag for years, and no one had raised any objection to it except the few for whom it conveyed a negative image of India. In the Assembly debate, Nehru argued that the charkha presented an aesthetic problem. Its spindle appeared to the left of the spinning wheel when the flag was seen frontally and to the right when seen on the reverse. He wanted the spindle to go and only the wheel to remain. He did not stop there and asked the apparently strange question as to 'what type of wheel' it should be. The answer was obvious—namely, the wheel of the charkha. But that answer was not acceptable to him and many others who were more keen on the twenty-four spoked *chakra* that appears on the abacus of the Sarnath Lion Capital of Aśoka. Since they did not wish to dismiss the spinning wheel altogether as that would have alienated a powerful group, and also because some of them had a lingering attachment to it, they sought instead to reassure its champions that Aśoka's *chakra* was 'basically' like the spinning wheel and had the additional advantage of signifying righteousness, universalism, and 'India's ancient culture'. As Nehru put it in the Constituent Assembly debate, Aśoka's *chakra* 'retains in its entirety the conception behind the charkha and is in fact a continuation of the idea in a somewhat more feasible and artistic form more suited to the flag'. It is difficult to say whether he was being disingenuous or genuinely believed his specious rhetoric. Not just any kind of wheel signified charkha, whose wheel has a particular structure and form. Furthermore, the wheel of the charkha stood for the dignity of manual labour, concern for the poor, setting aside some time for quiet and solitary contemplation, and so on, none of which Aśoka's *chakra* symbolized.

Undaunted by these and other considerations, Nehru went on to insist that Aśoka's *chakra* was not very different from Gandhi's charkha and represented both India's ancient culture and the poor, both Aśoka and Gandhi, the latter 'directly' and the former 'indirectly'. This wonderful 'synthesis', he said, made him 'exceedingly happy'.²⁵ The Constituent Assembly unanimously approved of the flag with Aśoka's *chakra* in its middle. Gandhi, who had followed the discussion closely,

was cryptic and guarded in his response. Initially keen on the charkha, he later gave in, saying there was no point in having its wheel on the flag if it found no place in people's hearts and that it was acceptable to have Aśoka's chakra if it signified the charkha as well.²⁶

Like the name of the country, the national flag involved fudging differences and cultivating systematic ambiguity. Many influential leaders were keen on Aśoka's chakra but could not ignore the charkha for historical, political, and emotional reasons. The way out was to claim that it was similar enough to the spinning wheel to represent it. Like 'India that is Bharat', the wheel on the flag is 'chakra that is charkha' and, at a different level, 'Aśoka that is Gandhi' or rather 'Gandhi that is Aśoka', the former being better known. Similarly, the colours of the flag were not supposed to represent different religious communities as they were initially designed to do and what most Indians thought they did but rather different sets of moral and spiritual values. Once India embarked on the road of representing its religious communities on its flag, it could not deal with the resulting problems without recourse to such obfuscation.

National Anthem

At Independence, India had quite a few national songs. Three of them had acquired considerable popularity—namely, 'Vande Mātaram' (hereafter 'VM'), 'Jana Gana Mana' (hereafter 'JG'), and 'Saare Jahan se Achchā'—the first two far more than the third. The choice of the national anthem was made between them, rendered difficult by the fact that each had its strong and weak points.

'VM' had a long and moving history. Composed by Bankim Chatterjee in 1875 and incorporated in his *Ānandamath* in 1882, it soon became highly popular. Several groups sprang up to champion it including a suggestively named Bande Mātaram Sampradāya. Tagore, the author of 'JG', himself admired it greatly, set it to music in 1906, and called its first two words a 'sacred mantra'. Sung at Congress sessions as well as countless formal and informal gatherings, it was closely associated with the struggle for independence. Indeed, its first two words became a battle cry, signifying defiance of the colonial rule and a demand for Independence, and to shout them was to invite police brutality. The first flag of India was called the VM flag and included its first

two words, as did the one Madame Bhikaji Cama hoisted in Stuttgart in 1907, the first time an Indian flag had been flown outside India.

Although 'VM' had attained the position of an unofficial national anthem as Aurobindo Ghose put it, it was perceived to have four disadvantages. First, much of it was written in dense Sanskrit, and many including Nehru remarked that they did not understand and could not even correctly pronounce some of its words. Second, it invoked Durga and her terrifying powers, and thus had strong Hindu associations. Third, since it was part of Bankim's *Ānandamath* where it was sung by Hindu ascetics rebelling against Muslim rulers and their British allies, it was taken by some to reflect hostility to Muslims, some of whom had even burned copies of the book. Fourth, it could not be easily set to orchestral or military band music, and that limited its capacity to arouse the masses and serve as a national anthem.

The advocates of 'VM' argued that except the first, the other disadvantages of 'VM' could be easily overcome. The second could be taken care of by selecting the first stanza or the first two as was a common practice; this was suggested by Tagore in a letter to Nehru in 1937 and by Nehru's working committee a few months later, and was done with 'JG'. The third criticism relating to its historical provenance was answered by pointing out that it was originally written as an independent song, that setting it in a novel did not necessarily reflect the author's sentiments, and that its reference to seven crore Indians showed that it included all communities including the Muslims.²⁷ As for the final criticism, it was argued that the song could be set to orchestral and military music if sung in a particular way, and that in any case this could not be a decisive consideration in the choice of a national anthem.²⁸

Like 'VM', 'JG' too had a long history.²⁹ First sung in 1911 at the twenty-sixth Congress session in Calcutta, it had been sung at its several subsequent sessions and enjoyed considerable popularity. It too had its strong and weak points as its advocates and critics pointed out. The former included its simplicity and intelligibility, its tune, adaptability to orchestral and military music, absence of Hindu references, universalism, generosity of the spirit, and the fact that it was not too closely identified with the Indian National Congress. Its critics argued that its weak points outweighed its merits.³⁰ It was just as religious as 'VM', perhaps even more. If we took only the first stanza of 'VM', there was nothing religious about it, whereas 'JG', which sang the praise and

invoked the blessings of the divine architect of India's destiny, was a prayer, which is why Tagore called it *dharmasangit*; and Gandhi, a 'devotional hymn'.³¹ More importantly, 'JG' was not an integral part of India's struggle for independence. It had not inspired Indians to sacrifice their lives and liberty for their country's independence, no blood had been shed in its name, and it did not evoke powerful historical and emotionally charged memories that a national anthem should.

'JG', its critics argued, had a limited poetic content. It did little more than list various parts of India, neither making them come alive nor evoking their historical and geographical richness. It excluded several other parts of the country and lacked an all-India appeal, a point conceded by Tagore himself when he suggested that it should be revised to include the whole of India's 'physical self'. The fact that it included Sindh, which no longer belonged to India, reinforced its sense of bitterness and fed Pakistan's fears of India's expansionist design.³² This was why Nehru thought it 'very clear' that its wording was 'not wholly appropriate and some changes would be necessary'. Even when it was accepted as a national anthem by the Constituent Assembly, Rajendra Prasad said that this was 'subject to such alterations in the words as the government may authorise'. He wanted to include the excluded provinces and render it in the country's official language, something Subhas Chandra Bose had got done for his Indian National Army (INA) several years earlier.

The final criticism of 'JG' had to do with the widespread belief that Tagore had composed it in honour of George V to mark his visit to India in 1911. The belief was mistaken and arose out of false and tendentious reports in the English language press. Tagore himself denied the story and dismissed it as beneath contempt.³³ That, however, did not convince some of his critics who wondered why he had not refuted the charge immediately and waited a considerable time before publicly setting the record straight.³⁴

The choice of the national anthem was left to the Constituent Assembly.³⁵ It was deeply divided in its attitudes to the two candidates, as was the public opinion in the country at large.³⁶ One poll in Bombay showed that 'VM' was preferred for its historical associations, inspirational appeal, and poetic content; and 'JG', for its tune and national characteristics.³⁷ Nehru and some of his colleagues strongly favoured 'JG' but could not be sure that the majority of the Assembly

would support them. This may perhaps explain why they did not ask the Assembly to decide the matter before Independence as should have been done and was done in the case of the national flag. In fact, H.V. Kamath had suggested in the Constituent Assembly as early as 29 July 1947 that its president should appoint a committee ad hoc 'to go into this question of our *Rashtrageet* so that it may be decided early'. The president replied that the national anthem might take a little more time than the flag did and we should not be in a hurry about it. His reply indicates that the decision was expected to be controversial and unlikely to go the way many influential members of the Assembly wanted. This left the Nehru government free to make a 'provisional' decision at Independence. It chose 'JG' and brought the matter to the Assembly nearly two years later, by which time it had for all practical purposes acquired the status of a national anthem. To his credit, Nehru had written to provincial governments for their views and reported to Parliament that 'all but one' of them had 'plumped' for 'JG'. This was an exaggeration because a strong opposition had come from the governments of the Central Provinces and West Bengal as well as sections of the Congress party elsewhere, and even those who supported it were sometimes rather lukewarm.

In the Constituent Assembly debate and in his correspondence with B.C. Roy, the chief minister of Bengal, and one of the strongest advocates of 'VM', Nehru gave his own reasons for recommending 'JG'. First, a national anthem should represent not just the struggle and the longing but the sense of victory and fulfillment.³⁸ While 'VM' did the former, 'JG' did the latter. This was Nehru's response to the criticism that unlike 'VM', 'JG' was not associated with the struggle for independence, and its history had not been written in the blood of the martyrs. Second, a national anthem is chiefly music and not words, tune not poetic content, and its music should have a certain 'lilt' or rhythmic and moving quality about it. 'JG' met this requirement better than 'VM'.

Third, a national anthem should be capable of being played all over the world, and its real significance is 'more abroad' than at home. In fact it is played more in other countries than in the home country and is meant more for outsiders than for the citizens of the country. Nehru remarked that orchestras and bands in New York and elsewhere had set 'JG' to a most moving music, and that it was greatly admired by

foreign audiences. Finally, Nehru argued that the national anthem must be intelligible to all and should be composed in the simple Hindustani that most Indians understood. 'JG' met this requirement, while 'VM' did not.³⁹

Nehru's reasons for preferring 'JG' did not convince many of its critics.⁴⁰ As for his first reason, they could not see why the national anthem should represent victory and fulfilment rather than struggle and longing. After all, it moved people and was an object of their love and loyalty precisely because it expressed their longing and had inspired them and their forbears to make great sacrifices of life and liberty. Detached from their collective memory of longing and struggle, the anthem had no meaning or appeal for them and was no different from other national songs. It was not clear what Nehru meant by 'victory and fulfilment' and how 'JG', which largely invoked divine blessings for India, represented either. Nehru's second reason was no more persuasive. Although music was important, words were no less so. The national anthem was expected to arouse patriotic sentiments, which depended not only on its tune but also on the images of the country its words evoked.

As for Nehru's third reason, his critics felt that it was untrue and even offensive. Contrary to Nehru's assertion, the national anthem was played more at home than abroad and was primarily meant for the citizens of the country whom it wished to inspire and unite. Foreigners could have no interest in it and joined in only on formal occasions involving India. Their opinion was of no consequence and could not be a factor, let alone an important one, in choosing the national anthem. Nehru's critics thought that his appeal to the foreign praise of 'JG' displayed his own and his supporters' colonial sense of inferiority, and was unworthy of a proud and independent country. Nehru's fourth reason carried more weight with his critics. Indeed, nearly two decades earlier, the Congress Working Committee had laid down several criteria for a national anthem, one of the most important being that it should be composed in simple Hindustani. Even the otherwise simple 'JG' did not wholly meet this requirement, and proposals had been made to render parts of it into an easily intelligible Hindustani.

Although Nehru's reasons were unconvincing, the case for 'JG' was comparatively strong, especially as the language, Hindu associations, and unacceptability to Muslims of the 'VM' argued against it. A powerful current of opinion, however, was strongly in support of 'VM'.⁴¹

Notwithstanding Nehru's repeated pleas for 'JG' and the momentum generated by the 'provisional' decision to adopt it, he could not be sure that the Constituent Assembly would support it.⁴² Unlike the flag that was adopted by a resolution of the Assembly, the latter decided to appoint a committee to consider the matter and 'make recommendation'. The committee met but, rather than making a recommendation, left it to the chairman of the Assembly to make the choice. Rajendra Prasad duly announced on the last day of its last session that 'JG' was to be the national anthem of India. Knowing the strength of the feeling in the House, he added that 'VM' 'shall be honoured equally with 'JG' and shall have equal status with it', without explaining what this meant in practice and how 'VM' could enjoy 'equal' status when it was not a national anthem. His vague remark, which could be interpreted in any way one liked and decided the matter without settling it, was 'received with applause'. Indeed the Constituent Assembly ended its final session by singing both 'JG' and 'VM', in that order.⁴³

Just as the adoption of 'India' and 'Bharat' has not put other names of the country out of unofficial and even official circulation, that of 'JG' left space for its rivals. 'VM' continues to be sung at several unofficial and even semi-official functions. Indeed, even today every session of Parliament ends with it, as do those of some state assemblies. One might say that India has one and a half national anthem, 'JG' enjoying the full official and 'VM' an informal and honorary status, permitted even accepted but not required on formal occasions. The third most popular 'Saare Jahan' has not disappeared either and continues to be played by an army band at the Republic Day parade. While this way of reaching a decision, evident in other areas of political life as well, allows old controversies to linger on, as is still the case with 'VM', it also makes the defeat easier to bear and ensures peace until such time as the subject ceases to matter to people.

National Emblem and State Honours

Unlike the name of the country, the national flag, and the national anthem, other official symbols of the new state were decided not by the Constituent Assembly but by Nehru either by informal consultation with his colleagues or formally by his cabinet. None of the decisions was preceded or even followed by much public discussion.

Once India gained Independence, the British king's portrait on the currency notes could no longer be continued. On Nehru's initiative, the cabinet decided to replace it with the crest of the Aśoka pillar with a few changes.⁴⁴ Later, the national motto *Satyameva Jayate* was added to it, and the crest with the motto became the official emblem of India in January 1950. The Lion Capital of Aśoka is the crowning piece of the pillar he erected in the third century BCE at the deer park in Sarnath (a corruption of Sarangnath, meaning Lord of the deer). This was the place where the Buddha had delivered his first sermon on attaining enlightenment and set the wheel of law in motion (*dharmachakrapravartan*). The wheel in the centre of the national emblem represents the law of righteousness, which is universal in its scope and binds all rulers. The lions, sitting back to back and facing in four different directions, are taken to signify the importance of power, which is supposed to be stable and desirable only when guided by the law of righteousness as symbolized by the wheel.

The decision to choose *Satyameva Jayate* as the national motto was made by the cabinet. It is not clear why it chose a Sanskrit rather than a more easily comprehensible Hindustani motto and who suggested it. In any case, it was familiar to many; resonated with the Indian, principally the Hindu cultural, tradition; and fitted in with the Gandhian emphasis on truth. The motto had been used for over a century by the Brahmo Samaj as part of its creed and was widely used in Hindu religious books, periodicals, and banners of religious processions. Rajendralal Mitra, president of the reception committee of the second session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta in 1880, had it as his personal motto with the twofold difference that '*jayate*' was replaced by '*jayati*' and included the last word '*nānritram*'. Surprising as it may seem, the National Advertising Services Ltd too had made it its motto since 1946, and it even complained in a letter to the Home Ministry that it had a 'prior claim' on it and should not be forbidden by the government to use it as its motto as was now the case.

Satyameva jayate nānritram first seems to appear in the *Mundaka Upanishad*.⁴⁵ The same idea and sometimes the same formulation occur in several other texts as well and form part of a long tradition. Manusmṛiti (8:7) says, *Nāstisatyātparo dharma nāntrutātpatakam param* (There is no dharma higher than *satya*, and no sin higher than *anrita*). Valmiki Rāmāyana (106: 13, 'Ahalya Kand') says, *Satyamveshvaro loke ...*

satyānnāsti param padam (Satya alone is God in this world ... there is no higher stage than truth). Mahābhārata ('Adiparva', 95: 10) stresses the power and invincibility of truth when it says, *Ashvamedhasahastrādhi satyameva vishishyate* (Truth is more powerful than a thousand *ashvamedha* or victories secured by armed forces). These ideas in which satya and dharma are closely linked, and the former is considered invincible, are also to be found in medieval Sanskrit texts and the writings of Tagore, Gandhi, and other twentieth-century leaders. Stressing the importance of satya in Indian thought was particularly relevant in colonial India. The British rulers had often argued that truthfulness was basically a Western idea and either absent or enjoyed a low status in the Indian moral code. When Lord Curzon said so in his 1905 convocation address at Calcutta University, an offended Gandhi responded by citing several sources refuting him, starting with *Satyameva Jayate*.

The national motto *Satyameva Jayate* is part of this long and optimistic philosophical tradition.⁴⁶ 'Truth alone triumphs' does not fully capture its meaning. Truth in its conventional sense is an epistemological concept, and lacks the ontological and ethical connotation of satya. The term 'triumph' implies battle or struggle, and truth may face none. The more faithful translation of 'jayate' is 'prevails'. Satya prevails because it alone is real. *Asatya* has no basis in reality, is internally incoherent, and lacks the power to last long. Since human beings are fallible and prone to error, they misperceive, misunderstand, or fail to act on satya and generate conflict, disorder, and injustice—all manifestations of *asatya*. Although truth prevails in the end, its path is rarely smooth and straight.

Like the national emblem and motto, the system of state honours was decided by the Nehru government. Gallantry awards for the armed forces were established by a presidential decree on 26 January 1950 with retrospective effect and were called Param Vir, Maha Vir, and Vir Chakra. Further Chakra awards were introduced two years later. They were broadly along the lines established by the colonial rulers, differed only in their names, and involved little disagreement. Unlike the military awards, the civilian awards showed more imagination and provoked some disagreement. The presidential decree of January 1954 established two of them—namely, Bharat Ratna and Padma Vibhushan. The former was to be given to individuals of rare distinction who were worthy enough to be considered the 'Jewel of India'. The latter was

more common and was hierarchically divided into three categories—namely, *pehela*, *doosra*, and *teesra* class.

The idea that state honours should be named after the lotus, the national flower of India, and called the 'Order of the Lotus' seems to be Nehru's, and it had the support of many of his colleagues.⁴⁷ Although the symbolism of lotus has long been part of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, it is religiously neutral and intended to convey several related ideas. The lotus is pure and gentle, stands out from and brings beauty and lustre to its surroundings, and is unaffected by the mud around it. Recipients of Padma awards are supposed to possess moral rectitude, stand out from their surroundings, and bring lustre to their respective areas of life.

It would seem that the idea of dividing the Padma Vibhushan into three *vargas* or classes was Nehru's. Rajendra Prasad was not happy with it largely because it 'created a wrong impression about the value' of the two lower awards and proposed instead that they should have three different names. In a letter to Diwakar in September 1954, he suggested Padma Saurabh, Padma Paras, and Padma Prasoon, referring to the three parts of the padma respectively: *saurabh* referring to the sweet smell; *paras*, to the part from which the smell proceeded; and *prasoon*, to the whole flower.⁴⁸ Nehru agreed to drop the threefold gradation but insisted that the new names were 'too Sanskritistic and too difficult for the ordinary person to understand'⁴⁹ (the same sort of objection that he had raised against the wording of 'VM') and promised to come up with alternatives. Prasad replied that he 'did not agree with the view' but did not press the point. It is not clear who Nehru consulted, but he eventually came up with Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Vibhushan, the names by which they have been known since 1955.

I have so far discussed several national symbols and examined the reasons for their adoption. In their own different ways, they reflect a particular vision of India and a broad pattern of dealing with differences. Their choice reflects the spirit of tolerance and accommodation. When differences arose, attempts were made to win over the opponent; Nehru went to great length to explain why 'JG' should be the national anthem. Sometimes he employed dubious arguments and

was somewhat economical with truth, but that is a normal part of all political rhetoric. The very fact that he argued his case and consulted provincial governments and Congress leaders rather than rely on his personal charisma and a huge parliamentary majority shows that he respected his critics and valued consensus. Even after the consensus was reached, the defeated alternatives were treated with respect, and given an unofficial and even official recognition. 'VM' was accepted as a national song, and although the Constitution gives the country the official names of India and Bharat, others such as Hind and Hindustan continue to be used in popular and official discourse.

Sometimes when a consensus was not possible or had problematic consequences, deliberate ambiguity was introduced to settle the matter. The wheel on the flag is supposed to signify Aśoka's *dharmachakra* as well as Gandhi's spinning wheel. The colours of the flag were initially introduced to represent different religious communities. When that was found to be divisive and dangerous, they were decommunalized and turned into symbols of moral and spiritual values. One might see such deliberate ambiguity as a weakness, a failure to take a decisive stand, even perhaps as a disingenuous attempt to do one thing while pretending to do another. But equally one might see it as a judicious way of dealing with irresolvable differences. Rather than polarize opinion and provoke confrontation, one might secure agreement on the basics and allow people to interpret them differently, within a broad range.⁵⁰

The symbols were intended to give the new state a moral and spiritual basis, to 'spiritualize politics' as it was generally called. Although this aspiration has a long history in India going back to the Vedic period, it received renewed emphasis in the nineteenth century from a large number of leading thinkers and activists such as Ram Mohun Roy, Bankim, Gokhale, Ranade, Tilak, Tagore, Gandhi, and even Nehru and Ambedkar. Although they went about the task differently, they generally took spirituality to occupy a distinct space between morality and religion, overlapping with both but identical with neither. It involved morality but stressed the quality of the human 'soul', integrity of the individual, and purity of motives rather than just the conduct. And it went beyond morality by locating human beings within the cosmic order and stressing such virtues as humility, a sense of human finitude, reverence for nature, and ecological responsibility. While this brought spirituality close to religion, it differed from the latter in not being tied

to a belief in God, forms of worship, speculations about the afterlife, and rituals. One could be an atheist or agnostic and still be spiritual. To Indian thinkers, spiritualization of political life basically meant grounding it in a wider view of human existence, emphasizing the quality of the human spirit as much as that of the social and political institutions, forging moral bonds among citizens, and highlighting the values and ideals the state should aim to realize. The national symbols of independent India are part of this tradition and seek to locate the state within a moral and spiritual framework. Despite their ambiguity, colours of the flag are supposed to symbolize such values as the spirit of self-sacrifice, truth, and a respectful and responsible attitude to nature. The national crest signifies both the importance of power and its subordination to dharma, and the national motto explicitly reiterates the message that righteousness alone prevails in the end.

India is a secular state and defines the latter as one that does not officially endorse, institutionalize, or privilege a particular religion. This raises the question whether its symbols meet this requirement. Two of the three colours of the Indian flag were initially introduced to represent Hindus and Muslims, but they have subsequently been taken to signify certain moral and spiritual values. Even if we accepted their original significance, they have no substantive religious content and do nothing more than represent the two major communities. The fact that the flag might publicly acknowledge religious communities offends an austere and narrow view of secularism characteristic of the French *laïcité*, but India has explicitly rejected it. Being of Buddhist origin, the wheel in the flag does have religious associations. However, it has over time become a cultural rather than a religious symbol, has no religious content, involves no religious beliefs, and stands for nothing more than the importance and universality of moral values.

The national motto is rather different in nature. It is in Sanskrit, the language of the Hindu religious literature, and is derived from the *Mundaka Upanishad*, a Hindu text. It might therefore seem to identify the state with a particular religion and compromise its secular character. Such a view, though not without some merit, is open to two objections. The *Mundaka Upanishad* is basically a philosophical rather than a religious text and is largely concerned with discussions of abstract metaphysical issues. Even if one saw it as a religious text, the fact that a sentence occurs in it does not make it religious in nature. Second, and

more importantly, the national motto has no religious content and does not presuppose a religious belief. It is echoed in many religious and secular traditions of thought, and is not unique to the Hindus. It is also basically aspirational, and all Indians are not expected to assent to it.

The national anthem is the only symbol to have an explicit reference to divinity. And since it is sung at all official and formal functions, it might seem to impose religion on and violate the moral integrity of non-believers. The religious content of the anthem, however, is thin and formal. *Bhārat bhāgya vidhātā* need not be conceived as a divine being. And even if it were, as Tagore intended, it bears only a limited resemblance to God in the conventional sense of the term, does not involve substantive beliefs, is conceived in non-sectarian terms, and nothing more is expected of him than his general blessings. What is no less important, the singing of the national anthem is not compulsory.⁵¹ Non-believers are only expected to stand and show respect when it is sung but need not participate in it themselves, and their freedom of conscience remains inviolate.

Although the national symbols do not compromise Indian secularism, they reflect a strong Hindu–Buddhist cultural bias.⁵² The name of the country (Bharat), the national motto, one or possibly two colours of the flag, and the lotus as the basis of the system of state honours are derived from the Hindu tradition. The national emblem and the wheel on the flag are Buddhist, and the lotus too has a pride of place in that tradition. Green colour in the flag was initially introduced and is widely taken to symbolize Islam, but that interpretation has been discouraged by influential leaders since the 1930s. If that is taken seriously, no national symbol reflects the centuries of Muslim presence in India. If an Indian Muslim were to argue that the symbolic world of the Indian state does not acknowledge him, his criticism would be difficult to refute. It is true that India's symbols, any more than those of any other country, cannot be eclectically drawn from all its various communities. However, Muslims were the largest minority, had ruled over large parts of the country for several centuries, had a profound cultural influence on it, and needed to be publicly acknowledged after the Partition, just as they had been by Gandhi and others when they introduced the green colour on the flag over two decades earlier. If the architects of modern India had given the matter their careful consideration, they could have easily found a space for Islam. One obvious

place was the national motto. A similar and perhaps politically more relevant one could have been found in one of the countless sayings of India's Sufi saints or in someone like Kabir, a rightly admired bridge builder between India's two major communities.

How do we explain both the strong Hindu-Buddhist orientation of most of the symbols and the absence of Islam? The Buddhist presence in the national symbols owed much to Nehru. When he had a free hand, he generally, though not always, opted for Buddhist symbols, such as the wheel on the flag and the national crest. He greatly admired the Buddha's life and teachings, was anxious to bypass Hindu-Muslim divisions, and turned to Buddhism as one way to do so. He sought to locate India within the Asian context and saw in Buddhism a great opportunity to establish close ties with other Asian countries. He held Aśoka in the highest esteem, viewed him the patron saint of the Indian state, and adopted symbols that were in some important way associated with him. These and other considerations were not unique to Nehru. An influential body of opinion in the Congress and even in the country at large shared Nehru's view and wanted Buddhism to be given prominence.⁵³

As for the strong Hindu influence, it had several sources. Hindus formed an overwhelming majority in the Constituent Assembly and the country at large. There was also a powerful and vocal Hindu nationalist group in the Assembly and the Congress party at large, and its influence increased after the Partition. While some of its members displayed varying degrees of anti-Muslim sentiments, most were largely concerned about asserting their Hindu identity and giving the new state an appropriate ethos. They used all their influence to name the country Bharat and get 'VM' an equal status. While Nehru and others successfully resisted some of their demands, they could not resist all and sought a compromise.

The character of the independence movement was another important factor. Its leadership was predominantly Hindu and largely drawn from the upper castes. This was as true of the militant movement that had begun in the 1880s and the communists as of the Indian National Congress under Gandhi's leadership. Although the Congress sought to reach out to other communities, especially the Muslims, its success was limited for reasons that had to do with both. As a result, the cultural and political ethos of the independence movement was built up without

much Muslim influence, and the symbols it threw up reflected that ethos. The movement had secular aspirations and goals but a Hindu cultural ethos that limited the imagination and sensibility of its leaders, including some of the most secular minded among them. Islam fell out of their view not so much because of their hostility to it or because they were crypto-Hindu, though this was true of some of them, but because it did not form part of the intellectual framework within which they thought and acted. They might have accommodated it and even given it symbolic prominence if the Muslim leaders had pressed their case. Thanks to the Partition, they had other more important things to worry about and lacked the necessary self-confidence, sense of legitimacy, and political power.

The national symbols express a noble and inspiring vision of India. They are historically evocative, aesthetically pleasing, non-sectarian, stress great values, and represent the country's moral, cultural, and political capital. Like all such symbols, they can be used to inspire its people, to embarrass and generate a sense of guilt in them when they betray the ideals the symbols represent, and serve as a beacon in dark times.

GANDHI-TAGORE DEBATES

According to the Upanishad, the reconciliation of the contradiction between tapasyā and ānanda is at the heart of creation, and Mahatmaji is the prophet of tapasyā and I am the poet of ānanda.¹

—Tagore

[We] hit each other hard in the cause of truth.

—Tagore

I may say in all humility that we complement each other's activity.

—Gandhi

The Indian independence movement was led by men and women of remarkable intelligence, courage, and independence of mind. They deeply disagreed about many important issues, criticized each other without inhibition, and built up over time a rich and lively tradition of public discourse. When Gandhi became the dominant leader of the Independence movement, his style of leadership, actions, vision of India, and view of human life in general were subjected to critical examination. Different individuals and groups publicly disagreed with some or all of these in different degrees, and he generally responded to them. His debates with the Hindu nationalists, modernists, orthodox Brahmins, Ambedkar, Jinnah, the Left, and Tagore were the most important among them. Each of these had a different character depending on the nature, area, and depth of disagreement, and the personal and political relations between Gandhi and his interlocutor. In some, the differences

between Gandhi and his critics were deep, but they were held in check and their expressions moderated by their close personal relations, as was the case with Nehru, J.P. Narayan, Indulal Yajnik, and others. In some others, these were further accentuated by differences of temperament, clashes of egos, or conflicts of interests, as was the case with those involving Jinnah and Ambedkar. In some cases, again, the debate led to better understanding and narrowed the differences, as with the orthodox Brahmins. In others, it sharpened them even further once each side better understood the implications of the other's position, as was the case with the communists and the Hindu nationalists.

Gandhi's personal relations and public disagreements with Tagore were in a class by themselves. Unlike Jinnah, Nehru, Ambedkar, and many others, Tagore was eight years older than him, a matter of some significance in the Indian context. He was already a global figure, having won the Nobel Prize in 1913, when Gandhi appeared on the Indian scene, and commanded an influential constituency in India and abroad. Unlike many of Gandhi's other interlocutors, Tagore was primarily a literary figure and judged Gandhi's ideas and actions from his unique perspective. He had a clearly worked out philosophy of his own, which gave his views considerable intellectual depth and coherence. Since Tagore had no political ambition, he did not need Gandhi's patronage and could speak his mind freely without having to worry about the likely consequences of Gandhi's displeasure. Like Gandhi, he was driven by an unusually strong sense of 'destiny' or 'life's mission', which gave him a fierce sense of independence and his courageous voice a rare moral intensity.² Even when his countrymen disagreed with him, they felt the power of his thought, and Gandhi had to make sure that Tagore was on his side at crucial moments.³

Although Gandhi and Tagore were not close friends or political comrades and did not enjoy easy informality, they had great respect for each other and recognized each other's greatness in terms that meant much to the other. Gandhi admired Tagore's moral courage, purity of life, uncompromising commitment to truth, poetic genius, exquisite jealousy of India's honour, brilliant interpretation of India's civilizational heritage, humanism, and internationalism. Tagore, for him, was a 'sentinel', a moral 'lighthouse', a guardian of the country's conscience, and hence 'Gurudev', a term popularized though not coined by Gandhi.⁴ For his part, Tagore was fascinated by Gandhi's

thought, personality, and actions, and wrote about him on several occasions.⁵ For him, Gandhi was a 'Mahatma', a man who had risen above the narrow sense of selfhood by identifying himself with all human beings and becoming an embodiment of 'universal humanity'. Gandhi had transcended the barriers of religion and race, was committed to the relentless pursuit of truth, and had developed a new ethics and politics based on the principles of *ahimsā* and universal love. He was a complete man who was absolutely one with his ideas, and had a rare wholeness and integrity.⁶ This gave Gandhi 'immense *shakti*' and the ability to energize the masses and bring out the best in them. Comparing him to Christ and the Buddha, Tagore remarked that Gandhi's life was a lesson for all ages to come. Gandhi had his fads, ideological blind spots, pet formulas, and naive idealistic impulses, but they did not limit his deep and insistent humanity, which constantly broke through their grip and expressed itself in a rare spirit of tolerance and generosity. As Tagore once put it, Gandhi was 'greater than his creed' and 'greater than his virtues'.⁷

Since Tagore and Gandhi thought highly of each other and were bonded by deep mutual respect, they took serious note of what each said and did, and engaged in an uninhibited public debate. In their public controversy, Tagore invariably fired the first shot.⁸ As a supreme leader of the Independence movement, Gandhi set the tone of the national struggle and exercised a profound effect on the country's ways of thought and life. Tagore, who deeply cared for India and had his own views on its direction of development, could not remain indifferent to him. He was also suspicious of all forms of power and the ease with which it could be used by even the most well-meaning leaders to encourage blind conformity. He therefore watched Gandhi closely, the more so as the latter's hold over his countrymen increased, and felt a duty to speak out when Gandhi in his view was using his great moral authority to promote dubious values and dangerous habits of thought.

Although Tagore was and often described himself as a poet and received his Nobel Prize as one, he was also a philosopher, a novelist, a playwright, an artist, an educationist, and a political and cultural commentator. Gandhi generally referred to him as 'the poet', something he rarely did in relation to anyone else. Perhaps he did so innocently in deference to the prevailing practice. Perhaps he had deeper reasons

as is more likely in a man as astute as him. In any case, it served three important purposes. First, unlike his other interlocutors who broadly operated on the same political terrain as him, Tagore's disagreements with Gandhi were different in their nature and basis. Not surprisingly, they often intrigued and sometimes irritated him. Calling him a poet was Gandhi's way of placing him, making sense of him, and understanding where he was coming from.⁹

Second, it allowed Gandhi to distinguish himself fairly sharply from Tagore and explain to their countrymen why the two disagreed. Tagore was a 'poet', whereas Gandhi who said he had never succeeded in 'writing a single rhyme in my life'¹⁰ was in his own words a 'humble' man of action condemned to dealing with the mundane problems of his countrymen as best he could. The two therefore necessarily saw the world differently, had their own distinct vocations and dharma, and their disagreements were only to be expected.

Third, which is closely related to the second, referring to Tagore as 'the poet' or the 'Bard of Santiniketan' enabled Gandhi to limit the impact of Tagore's criticism by warning his readers that his judgements on matters political were not to be taken too seriously. As Gandhi said during one of their debates, the poet enjoyed a 'licence' to exaggerate, lived in a world of his own, was indifferent to the constraints of political life, and delighted in the puristic pursuit of his dreams. Political life could not be conducted in this way and would cause havoc if it were. The poet did have an important moral role in political life, but it was limited and largely regulative. He was suited to be a critic, conscience, and a sentinel but not the leader of a movement, the keeper of a lighthouse, not the captain of a ship.

Although Tagore and Gandhi shared much in common, their differences were equally deep. They disagreed on several important issues such as the Non-cooperation Movement, the importance of the charkha, the nature of Indian nationalism, the Bihar earthquake, and intercultural dialogue. Each of these led to a major and, at times heated, public debate. Although their disagreements on other matters did not generate public controversy, they surfaced from time to time in their private and public exchanges. Since these and other differences sprang from their different philosophies of life, it would be useful to begin with the latter and explore how they were played out in the context of particular issues.

Religious, Moral, and Political Thought

Gandhi and Tagore were both deeply religious.¹¹ They placed human beings at the centre of religion, stressed human conduct and character rather than theological beliefs, and gave religion a strong humanist orientation. They attacked its institutional and ritual aspects, emphasized man's unmediated personal relation with God, welcomed inter-religious dialogue, and were partial to and borrowed heavily from Christianity.¹² Since they were both rooted in the Hindu religious tradition, Tagore being more sympathetic to its classical Upanishadic tradition and Gandhi to the Gita, they shared a common philosophical vocabulary and articulated their visions of human life in terms of such central categories of the Indic especially the Hindu civilization as *satya*, *shakti*, *shivam*, *māyā*, *sādhana*, *tapasyā*, *mukti*, and *karma*. Even when they disagreed, each knew what the other was talking about and how much they shared at other levels.

Although Gandhi and Tagore were both religious, they differed in their views of God, the world, human nature, and moral life. Tagore's God was a creative artist 'struggling and toiling' to build an ever more beautiful world by 'trial and error', to 'improve it from good to better and from better to best',¹³ which is how Tagore understood evolution. God was not omniscient and omnipotent because he would then have created a perfect world from the beginning. The world in all its richness and diversity was the medium of divine self-expression and was informed by a single spiritual principle. 'The same stream of life that runs through my veins day and night runs through the world' and forms 'one sweet harmony'. There was a 'natural sympathy of life for life', and to live well was to live in harmony with nature and with other human beings.

For Tagore, the world was not a distraction from God but rather a medium through whose infinite beauty he revealed himself. 'When I go from hence, let this be my parting word that what I have seen is unsurpassable.'¹⁴ Indeed one life was not enough to enjoy it, and Tagore would not be opposed to several more. To take delight in the world's beauty and add to it by creating beautiful tangible and intangible objects was to worship God. Since the senses took one nearer to God rather than away from him, they should all be fully developed in order to appropriate him in his plentitude. 'Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand

bonds of delight.' Tagore shared the Hindu ideal of *mukti* or *moksha* but radically redefined it. The self-dissolution that it involved did not mean annihilating or emptying the self but rather opening it up to and suffusing it with the richness of the world.

Gandhi understood God differently. For him, God was a cosmic power who structured and governed the universe. He was not separate from the law that regulated the universe but rather the law itself. To love God was to love his creation, and that meant dedicating oneself to the tireless service of all living beings, especially the humans, with one's body, intellect, and possessions. For him, as for Tagore, *moksha*, which the latter preferred to call *mukti*, was the highest spiritual goal and consisted in liberating oneself from the *māyā* of narrow selfhood. Unlike Tagore, however, it was to be achieved not by enjoying the world in all its richness but rather by reducing oneself to zero, that is, by purifying oneself of all that was base, shedding ties and attachments to the world, and aiming at emancipation from or extinction of the bondage of the flesh.

Morality meant much to both Gandhi and Tagore, but they took somewhat different views of it. For Gandhi, morality formed the substance of the good life; for Tagore, beauty too was just as important. Gandhi subordinated beauty to morality, defined and judged it in moral terms, and thought that what did not 'uplift' the individual could not be considered beautiful. Tagore took the opposite view and saw morality as a form of beauty. Beauty meant harmony, peace, and wholeness, and morality consisted in finding *ānanda* by living in harmony with one's fellow men.¹⁵ Discord or conflict in social life was like discordant notes in a musical piece. It was produced by greed, selfishness, hatred, aggression, exploitation, the desire for domination, and hence these were all both ugly and evil.

Gandhi and Tagore differed greatly in their attitudes to nature including both the external world and the human nature. Tagore established a much closer relation between human beings and the natural world than Gandhi did. For Tagore, the natural world was not external to but an integral part of human life, an active force that profoundly structured and shaped it at various levels; for Gandhi, it was largely passive and little more than the context and condition of human existence. For Tagore, the natural world evoked love and delight; for Gandhi, humility, awe, and gratitude. For Tagore, it reflected diversity, unpredictability,

and divine playfulness; for Gandhi, regularity, uniformity, and a well-structured system of interdependence.

The differences between the two were particularly striking in their attitudes to human nature including natural desires. Tagore emphasized the variety of human nature and the vastly different ways in which human beings instantiated and realized it. While acknowledging human differences, Gandhi stressed the uniformity of human nature and the fundamental similarity of human beings. Tagore saw human nature as a medium of divine self-expression, satisfaction of natural desires as an integral part of the good life, and sexuality as a vehicle of love, whereas Gandhi drew a fairly sharp distinction between nature and spirit or the body and the soul. The body was not an integral part of the human self but a bondage, an obstacle, that had to be subdued so that it became a pliant instrument of the spirit and made no independent demands of its own. The bodily desires therefore had to be controlled and subordinated to spiritual goals. Sexuality had no other purpose than procreation; to indulge in it for pleasure was to be a slave to the body. The point of eating was to assuage hunger and stay alive; to indulge in its endless variety or devise ever-new ways of titillating one's appetite was both to surrender to the body and make illegitimate and exploitative demands on the natural world. The struggle against natural desires required great discipline, will power, and self-mastery, all of which were central to Gandhi's thought in a way they were not to Tagore's.

Both Gandhi and Tagore rejected the narrowly rationalist view of human reason, according to which reason is the highest human faculty, controls or should control all others, and is at its best when dissociated from their influence. For Gandhi, such a view of reason gave a simplistic account of human beings. It ignored the role and influence of other human faculties, took a narrow view of reason, and was really a piece of idolatry. Reason was certainly an important human faculty and should be given its due place in life, but it was neither the only one nor the highest. Some areas of life were beyond its reach and required faith. While every belief must pass the test of reason, one may, when reason was silent or undecided, go beyond it. Intuition, especially moral intuition, also played a great part in human life. Human beings not only had a head but also a heart, the seat of certain natural dispositions and sympathies, which guided reason and formed an autonomous source

of human motivation. They also had a soul, the spark of the divine, and could, when suitably trained, hear the still small voice of God. Unless such a voice was patently irrational, it had its own independent authority and deserved to be respected. For Gandhi, human choices, beliefs, and actions were the products not of reason alone but of several interacting and mutually regulating faculties, some more important in some areas than in others.

Like Gandhi, Tagore too subscribed to a pluralist epistemology. For him, reason was an important human faculty but neither the highest nor self-contained. As embodied beings, human beings had a particular kind of orientation to the world. They also had certain natural sympathies. And being embedded in the thick texture of social relations, they developed affections and attachments that were an integral part of who they were. Reason no doubt had the ability to disengage itself from them all and function in an 'impersonal and therefore abstract' manner. Such an abstract reason—that is, reason detached from its human moorings and which Tagore called intellect—was ideally equipped to deal with the realm of abstract thought and the natural world, but it was wholly ill-equipped to deal with human beings who needed to be understood holistically in terms of their social and cultural roots. He put the point eloquently in the following remarks.¹⁶

Our life and our heart are one with us, but our mind can be detached from the personal man, and then only can it freely move in its world of thoughts. Our intellect is an ascetic who wears no clothes, takes no food, knows no sleep, has no wishes, feels no love or hatred or pity for human limitations, who only reasons unmoved through the vicissitudes of life.

For Tagore, the intellect had no 'personal concern or basis'. It was primarily interested in power, in mastering its object by studying its formal and general features, and sought 'not reality but law'. It inspired and lay at the basis of the modern Western civilization devoted to dominating its natural and social environment. The nation state, a uniquely modern institution, was a 'creation of the intellect', as was the capitalist economy, and both were causes of much violence and dehumanization.¹⁷ The intellect or abstract and impersonal reason also shaped modern moral life and reduced it to general, bureaucratic, and abstract rules devoid of emotional depth.

Although both Tagore and Gandhi took a plural view of human faculties and rejected narrowly based rationalism, they differed in their views on the scope of reason. In spite of occasional ambiguities, Tagore rejected Gandhi's 'inner voice' as an authoritative form of knowledge. Although Gandhi wanted traditions to be subjected to the test of reason, he generally tended to think that those that had lasted long were unlikely to be wholly devoid of reason and deserved respect unless shown to be patently irrational or immoral. Tagore did not share this view and was much more critical of them. Since Gandhi thought that God regulated the universe, he believed that the natural world could not be fully explained in its own terms and left considerable room for faith. For Tagore, the natural world was autonomous, and hence he gave reason a greater reach and was far more sympathetic to modern science. One should not, however, draw too neat a contrast between Tagore and Gandhi, seeing the former as a champion and the latter as the enemy of reason, as some of their commentators, including Amartya Sen, have done. Both valued reason but also stressed its limits and pleaded for a richer view of it. The difference between them was largely one of degree. After all Tagore was a poet, an artist, and deeply religious, and could not be an uncompromising rationalist.

Their different philosophies of life led Tagore and Gandhi to take different views of education, an extremely important activity and area of action for both. For Tagore, education involved cultivation of all the senses and equipping the pupil to appreciate the beauty of nature as well as the great aesthetic, intellectual, and other achievements of the human spirit. It was to take place in the open, and children were to be left free to pursue their interests and explore the natural world around them. They were to be subjected to minimum discipline and spared the 'mechanical pressure' of the classroom and its usual teaching methods. Their school was part of the local community, and they were to get to know the latter and develop a spirit of service to its members. As they grew older, they were to be exposed to the cultures of different parts of the world and taught to enjoy and feel at ease with their diversity. Tagore's school, suggestively called Vishva-Bharati, represented the confluence of *vishva* and Bharat, a place where the world was brought to Bharat and formed an integral part of the pupil's life.

Gandhi's educational views had a strong vocational and moral thrust. Children were to be taught useful crafts, and the proceeds of

their products were to be used to fund the activities of the school. Through the medium of the crafts, they were to be taught geography, history, the natural sciences, and other subjects as well as the dignity of manual labour and the ethics of human solidarity. For Gandhi, character building was one of the main goals of education, and children's natural impulses were to be tamed and trained through a regime of discipline exercised by teachers of exemplary character. The arts had a place in their education provided that they were morally uplifting.

What Tagore and Gandhi thought of each other's educational views is well illustrated by their first and last encounters. When Gandhi left South Africa for good, he sent his Phoenix boys to Tagore's school on the advice of their common friend Charles Andrews. Tagore welcomed them but found them too disciplined and lacking in intellectual curiosity and personal ideals. For his part, Gandhi thought that Tagore's institution catered largely to rich people's children, taught them things with little practical value, and failed to develop their capacity for self-discipline. As he got to know it better, his views softened. He admired its national and international ethos, teaching of crafts, and interest in rural reconstruction. He raised enough money to save it from financial collapse on one occasion and to guarantee it adequate operational funds on several others. In the last year of his life, Tagore asked Gandhi to take care of it and give it an assurance of permanence, fully confident that Gandhi would not only keep it in existence but also maintain its identity. It is a remarkable tribute to their high mutual regard that in spite of their differences and heated debates over two decades, Tagore entrusted Gandhi with something as precious as a 'vessel... carrying the cargo of my life's best treasure',¹⁸ and that Gandhi accepted and kept a friendly eye on an institution not based on his philosophy of life.

So far as their political thought was concerned, especially their views on nationalism, patriotism, the nature of the modern state, and the best way of reconstituting it, Gandhi and Tagore shared much in common.¹⁹ Although Tagore's usage was not consistent, he generally distinguished between society, community, state, and nation. Society, for him, referred to the formal and informal relations and the bonds of common interest and affection that human beings developed among themselves. It was an expression of their 'cooperative' or 'social' nature and hence an 'end in itself'.²⁰ It represented the realm of freedom,

choice, diversity, and spontaneity, and provided the necessary context of human existence. Every society over time tended to develop a sense of common belonging among its members as well as its own unique individuality. Tagore called it a community. A society or community sought to preserve itself against external and internal threats, and needed a structure of authority or what Tagore called state. The state represented the political dimension of society and performed the vitally important but limited task of safeguarding society, and providing a framework within which harmonious social relations and bonds could be formed. Sources of society's unity lay within it, and the state played only a supportive rule. For Tagore, the opposite had happened in the modern West. Since its members were atomized and lacked the thick texture of associative bonds, the state was the sole basis of their unity and stability and dominated the attenuated and impoverished society at various levels. Tagore called this a political or politically constituted society or civilization and distinguished it from the rightly ordered 'social civilization' of India, the traditional East, and premodern Europe.

For Tagore, the nation was different from all three and represented a unique form of social organization. It was geared to the realization of a single collective purpose to which all social relations were subordinated and around which all its members were mobilized. The collective purpose could be world domination, war, maximization of collective wealth, racial purity, or some other. Whatever it was, society was organized in terms of it and was like a machine, prizing efficiency and uniformity over everything else and demanding uniformity, discipline, and obedience. Intolerant of internal diversity and dissent, it was aggressive towards outsiders with whom it competed and whom it sought to dominate. The nation strengthened the state at the expense of society and undermined the latter's spontaneity, fluidity, and rich and vibrant associative life. Since this went against the normal rhythm of human life and perverted ordinary human relations, the nation could not last long without distorting normal human feelings and silencing critical reason. It did this by giving itself a quasi-divine status and encouraging its adoration through elaborate rituals and ceremonies that acted as a 'political anaesthetic'. Such a 'fraudulent religion' lay at the heart of all nationalism.²¹ For Tagore, nationalism represented a double pathology. The state which was just one dimension and institution of society was abstracted from it and given a central guiding role. It was then hijacked

and chartered in the service of a single goal determined by a dominant group seeking to shape society in its own image. While generally using the term 'nationalism' in this specific sense, Tagore sometimes muddied the discussion by using it in the conventional sense of collective selfishness, exclusivity, or aggressiveness. Although the two are closely connected, they are not the same, and the grounds for criticizing them are different.

Unlike nationalism, which was centred on the nation, patriotism for Tagore was centred on the state. It involved 'worship of the state'—that is, privileging it over all internal associations as well as the wider humanity, and giving it one's total and uncritical loyalty. Both patriotism and nationalism had a similar moral logic and a quasi-religious orientation. They differed in the object of their supreme loyalty and the mechanism by which that loyalty was generated and mobilized. Since Tagore opposed the abstraction of the state from society and setting it up as an independent entity with its distinct moral claims, patriotism for him was a misconceived even fraudulent sentiment. Although occasionally he tended to distinguish between good or enlightened and bad or jingoistic patriotism, he generally took a dim view of all forms of patriotism. The state was just one dimension of society and had only an instrumental value. Not the state but members of one's society should be the sole object of one's moral concern.

In Tagore's view, our country was not ours because of the accident of our birth, for that was a purely external relation devoid of moral significance.²² Rather it had to be *made* ours by taking an active interest in its affairs, shaping it in the light of our ideals with wisdom and love, and building it up with our service, our ideas and our activities. The country became ours because and when it was our creation, an expression of our powers and efforts. It was not 'given' but 'gained', not a brute fact but the 'truth' we 'realize' or 'attain' in and through our actions. For Tagore, love of one's country was an active sentiment, not a passive and self-indulgent emotion, and was focused not on the institution of the state but on the well-being of one's fellow members, consistent with due regard for that of the wider humanity. The non-exclusive and active love of one's countrymen that was to replace nationalism and patriotism did not develop in a vacuum. It required strong associative bonds with one's countrymen at various levels and a rich communal life. One then felt bound to them by the overlapping ties of common

sympathies, interests, and affections, and one's love of the country grew out of and was sustained by these.

Gandhi broadly shared Tagore's views. For him too, society, the realm of shared interests and sympathies, was the basis of human existence. The stronger the bonds of society, the less it needed to rely on the state to maintain its unity and stability. Like Tagore, he too was deeply worried about the way in which the colonial rule was insinuating the institution of the state in the traditional Indian society, dismantling old institutions and bonds, transforming the character of social existence, and making itself the sole basis and organizing principle of society. For Gandhi, as for Tagore, the country was nothing more than the totality of its citizens and had no independent moral status and interests of its own. It was their creation, as good or bad as they themselves, and was theirs to the extent that they identified with and took ownership of it.²³

Like Tagore, Gandhi argued that human beings grew up within and were integrally related to a particular natural and social environment or *swadesh*, and they lost their wholeness and rootedness when cut off from it. Since modern civilization undermined this unity, and fragmented and dehumanized the individual, it heavily relied on the coercive power of the state. In this respect Gandhi went much further than Tagore and advocated relatively self-sufficient local communities, which Tagore rightly thought intellectually limiting and economically unviable. Tagore's communities were located within a wider human context, and expected to be open and outward looking in a way that Gandhi's were not. Neither of them, however, explained how the unity of human beings with their environment was possible in an industrial, mobile, and increasingly globalizing world. The failure was more excusable in Gandhi, who did not much care for large-scale industrialization and global interdependence, than Tagore who understood their logic and importance better. Nor did either of them explain how national unity, a regulated economy, and redistributive justice, which they valued, were to be achieved in a society that assigned the state only a marginal role.²⁴

As for nationalism, Gandhi was only in partial agreement with Tagore. Like the latter, he rejected it in the conventional sense of collective selfishness and exclusiveness, and also in Tagore's sense of subordinating the entire society to a single goal. If India became narrow-minded, aggressive, and inward looking, 'I would not care to live

in India. She will cease to evoke any pride in me. My patriotism is subservient to my religion.'²⁵ Gandhi, however, thought that nationalism need not necessarily take an aggressive and collectivist form. It basically implied a strong sense of collective unity and identity and was needed to overcome internal divisions, subordinate individual interest to that of others, mobilize popular energy against foreign rule and threats, and foster pride in one's people and way of life. When so understood, nationalism was benign, generous, open, self-critical, morally uplifting, even 'life-giving', and a necessary stepping stone to internationalism. Gandhi thought this to be the case with Indian nationalism under his leadership. Tagore disagreed and argued that it too was infected by the virus inherent in all forms of nationalism. Their disagreement lay at the basis of their attitudes to Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement to which we now turn.

Non-cooperation Movement

In the aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the repression unleashed by the colonial government, Gandhi launched the Non-cooperation Movement, promising independence within a year if the country gave him its full support. For Gandhi, the British were able to rule India, a country several times larger than theirs and located thousands of miles away, because Indians actively or passively cooperated with them. They provided its armed forces, police, civil servants, prison guards, and clerical and manual staff; participated in its institutions; paid their taxes; and obeyed its laws. More importantly, they internalized the ideology in terms of which the colonial rulers justified their rule. They believed that the European ways of thought and life were the best, that their salvation lay in reorganizing their society along similar lines and that the British rule was in their interest. They discarded their languages in favour of English, pursued Western education, turned to British legal and judicial institutions to settle their disputes, sought to build a state-centred as opposed to the traditional socio-centric polity, and so on. Gandhi agreed that many Indians resented and even sought to end the colonial rule, but insisted that the Independence they wanted was from colonial rulers not their ways of thought, so that even if the British left the country, they would continue to rule over the Indian minds and hearts. Indeed the latter would then be even deeper for being indirect and invisible.

Gandhi thought that if the Indians could see through the hidden psychological and moral mechanism of colonial domination, and stopped cooperating with it at all levels, the British would no longer be able to rule the country. Accordingly, he called for a boycott of colonial institutions including the legislature, the courts, the schools, and the colleges—both to deny the colonial government the necessary manpower and legitimacy, and to create a space in which Indians could build alternative institutions. He also issued a call for the boycott of foreign cloth, which destroyed the indigenous industry and symbolized Indian fascination with things Western. Not content with this, Gandhi urged his countrymen to make a bonfire of foreign cloth and lighted one himself. His movement gave great hope to his humiliated and increasingly bitter countrymen. It generated enormous excitement, aroused powerful emotions, and brought the hitherto apathetic groups of men and women into political life. The mass mobilization that it needed for its success required evocative symbols, radical reorganization of the Indian National Congress, centralization and even personalization of authority within it, and relative simplification of complex issues, to all of which Gandhi attended with characteristic energy and zeal.

Tagore was deeply disturbed by Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement and attacked both its underlying principle and the climate it had created.²⁶ Non-cooperation involved rejection, even hatred of the West, and breathed the spirit of exclusion and short-sighted nationalism. It was a political form of asceticism, alienated Indian heart and mind from those of the West, and amounted to spiritual suicide. Rather than enclose itself within its narrow walls, India should open up itself to the West in the spirit of internationalism. Although the West had misunderstood Indian society and civilization and taken an unjustifiably low view of it, the proper response to it lay not in rejecting the West but rather in rising above the sense of hurt and appropriating what was best in it. The West had its ugly side, but it also had great achievements to its credit, was indeed the maker of the modern age, and had a universal mission. Avoiding the twin sins of self-depreciation and immoderate boastfulness, India should comprehend the soul of the West, learn from it, and strive for a genuine synthesis. Indeed this is what India had always done in the past so much so that the spirit of synthesis had become integral to the very idea of India.

Tagore was equally scathing about the boycott and especially the burning of foreign cloth. The boycott made no dent on poverty, one of its avowed objectives, and achieved little in practice. It signified racism and xenophobia, rejection of things because of their foreign origin, especially as Gandhi saw nothing wrong in using the products of Indian textile industries. The boycott especially the burning reflected the spirit of *himsa* which, apart from being wrong in itself, sat ill at ease with Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence and love. Tagore argued that rather than burn foreign cloth, it should be given away to the poor who badly needed them.

Tagore was also highly critical of what he thought to be the climate of intolerance generated by the Non-cooperation Movement. It had imposed uniformity of 'thought', 'feeling', and 'purpose' on the country. There was to be only one goal, independence of the country; only one way to achieve it, non-cooperation; and only one form of non-cooperation, boycott of institutions and foreign cloth. All Indians were expected to follow the official Congress line and those daring to dissent were accused of not caring for the country. This reinforced the familiar Indian habit of uncritically conforming to the prevailing orthodoxy and surrendering their judgement to that of their leaders. Gandhi's appeal was entirely to the emotion, which 'by itself' is blind and intolerant. 'Today to disagree with Mahatma and yet to find rest in one's surroundings is not possible.'²⁷ Tagore complained of an oppressive sense of moral loneliness, and even remarked that staying in India was putting a great mental strain on him.

Tagore was speaking from personal experience. His opposition to the Non-cooperation Movement and particularly to the burning of foreign cloth was heavily criticized by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, a great Bengali novelist, and by C.R. Das who even said that it did not behove Tagore to criticize the movement when he had deliberately kept himself away from it. Some Gandhian zealots even burnt foreign cloth in front of his house just to annoy him. Although Tagore exaggerated the depth of intolerance in the country, for many continued to criticize Gandhi's movement with no harm done to them and Tagore himself was subjected to nothing more sinister than some criticism, he was not wholly wrong to highlight the strong emotions Gandhi had aroused.

Gandhi's reply to Tagore was robust and uncompromising: Non-cooperation did not mean rejection of the West but rather cooperation

with it on one's own terms. Thanks to the Western cultural hegemony, Indians were mesmerized by and uncritically copied Western ways of thought and life, and had lost all pride in and even knowledge of themselves. They should certainly learn from the West, but they must first uncover and take a careful look at their own civilizational resources and decide freely and without external manipulation where these needed to be reformed. Such 'returning to oneself' to regain one's balance and autonomy did not mean rejection of the West. Rather it aimed at better self-understanding as a necessary precondition to cooperation with the West on equal terms. This kind of nationalism was quite different from the collectivist, exclusive, and aggressive nationalism that Tagore rightly condemned. In Gandhi's view, Tagore failed to see this because while the Non-cooperation Movement was 'altering the meaning of old terms, nationalism and patriotism, and extending their scope',²⁸ Tagore was still thinking in terms of their static and dated definitions.

While agreeing with Tagore that India should be outward looking and internationalist in its outlook, Gandhi argued that Tagore was wrong to draw a sharp contrast between nationalism and internationalism and privilege the latter. While taking care not to harm the interests of other countries, every individual had a prior duty to attend to those of his own. He lived in it, was nurtured by, and bound to it by countless ties, knew it better than he did any other, and was likely to have a greater impact on it. A rootless internationalist who claimed to care only for the world helped no one. He neglected his own community, and did no good to the rest of the world of which his knowledge was necessarily limited and for meeting whose vast demands his energy and moral resources were grossly inadequate. For Gandhi, healthy nationalism was a necessary step to internationalism. One who concentrated on building his country and setting a good example to others served the world as well, and was at once both a good nationalist and a good internationalist. In the Indian context, as in any situation of unequal power, Gandhi thought that Tagore's internationalism posed a subtle danger. Under the colonial rule, India had lost cultural self-confidence and was constantly tempted to imitate the West blindly. The stress on internationalism not only did nothing to counter but also reinforced that tendency because imitation of the West could easily masquerade as or legitimize itself in the name of internationalism as was the case with many Westernized Indians.

Tagore talked of India's message to the world and its synthesizing mission. Gandhi rejoined that it could offer little to the world if it was blind to its own heritage or did nothing to keep it in a healthy state of repair. India once stood for great values and vision of human life, but these were all in the past and it was busy abandoning them in favour of a Westernized future. 'In order to be fit to save others, we must try to save ourselves.' India must concentrate not on preaching to the world but addressing its own problems, mobilizing its own resources, and building its own strength, leaving it to the rest of the world to learn whatever, if anything, was valuable in its experiment.

Tagore had criticized the Non-cooperation Movement for creating the climate of conformity and intolerance. Gandhi welcomed his 'eloquent protest' and the 'necessity of watchfulness lest we cease to think',²⁹ but insisted that he had repeatedly given good reasons for non-cooperation and that many who participated in it had done so out of genuine conviction. While he had asked all Indians to support it, he respected those who did not and had urged his followers to do the same. His movement had aroused strong emotions, but there was nothing wrong in that. Emotions generated energy and were particularly important when the masses had to be mobilized for great collective purposes. All mass movements were vulnerable to excesses. The answer to that lay not in shying away from them but rather in imposing on them a regime of strong moral and organizational discipline as Gandhi thought he had done after the Chauri Chaura incident.

As for the boycott of foreign cloth, Gandhi insisted that there was nothing racist about it as it included not just the British but all foreign cloth including the Japanese. There was nothing xenophobic about it either because he welcomed foreign literature, religions, arts, and so on, and only objected to foreign cloth. The boycott, according to him, served several important purposes. In addition to putting economic and political pressure on the colonial government, it protected a portion of the domestic market for the poor Indian weavers and gave them employment. It raised the political awareness of and involved the hitherto marginal middle-class women in the independence struggle. It delegitimized foreign cloth as a marker of social status, reduced the visible distance between the rich and the poor, countered the country's *moha* for foreign products and helped restore its interest and pride in Indian things.

As for burning foreign cloth, Gandhi was equally uncompromising. According to him, it served two important purposes. Under the colonial rule, Indians had come to despise themselves—their beliefs, values, way of life, language, crafts, and material products. Their sense of national inferiority had gone so deep that it had virtually become their second nature, and a drastic measure was needed to exorcise it. Merely reasoning with them was not enough for that had gone on for years without producing results. The deepest layers of their psyche had to be tapped, and burning foreign cloth was the best way to do so. After lighting fire to a heap of expensive sarees and other foreign material, Gandhi remarked: 'It was a most inspiring sight.... And as the flames leapt up... there was a shout of joy resounding through the air. It was as if our shackles had been broken asunder. A glow of freedom passed through the vast concourse.'³⁰

For Gandhi, burning foreign cloth also served another purpose. The long humiliated and powerless India was seething with anti-British sentiments. The burning of foreign cloth had the cathartic effect of diverting their hatred from men to things. While it was *himsā* at one level as Tagore argued, at a deeper level it helped create a climate conducive to *ahimsā* towards British men and women. As Gandhi put it: 'India is racial today. It is with utmost effort that I find it possible to keep under check the evil passions of the people. The general body of the people are filled with ill-will because they are weak and hopelessly ignorant of the way to shed their weaknesses. I am transferring the ill-will from men to things.'³¹

Tagore had said that rather than burning foreign clothes, they should be given away to the poor. Gandhi replied that this was to 'insult' them. The poor did not know what to do with them and had no money even to take care of them. Giving them away did not expose the complicity of those who had deprived them of their livelihood by buying foreign clothes. More importantly, it would not trigger the deeper psychological and moral transformation in the Indian psyche that their burning was intended to achieve.³²

The Non-cooperation Movement, which lasted for about 19 months, had mixed results. It alerted Indians to their complicity in the colonial rule as well as their power to overthrow it. It encouraged them to take a fresh and critical look at their civilizational resources, threw up new kinds of educational institutions or 'nationalized' the existing

ones, gave a new impetus to regional languages, weakened fascination with Western things, and even led to the public appearance of traditional forms of dress.³³ It created a new public mood and an air of collective self-confidence. As Nehru put it in a letter to Lord Lothian several years later, the Non-cooperation Movement brought about a 'remarkable transformation' among Indians and gave them a new sense of themselves.³⁴

Despite these and related gains, some too intangible to measure or even specify, the movement ran into problems that Tagore had highlighted and Gandhi in his enthusiasm ignored.³⁵ It was pointless, even dangerous, to ask people to withdraw support from established institutions without first developing viable alternatives, which there was neither the time nor the right environment to do. People could withdraw their children from schools, but the alternative schools either did not exist or were patchy and poorly organized, with the result that children received not alternative education but no education. The same thing happened with the boycott of colonial courts. Since there were no alternative institutions for setting disputes, the latter either took ugly forms or people returned to the courts and unwittingly increased their legitimacy. The arbitration courts that were set up in a few places were short of staff, had no clear guiding principles or authority, and their findings were ignored. As Tagore pointed out, no doubt with some exaggeration, the Non-cooperation Movement risked leading the country to the 'anarchy of mere emptiness'.³⁶ It did not have to, but it did in the absence of adequate forethought and preparation. Very few individuals even gave up their titles (24 out of over 5,000) because they were hardly the kind of people to sympathize with Gandhi's cause, at least not strongly enough to make the necessary sacrifice. Only 94 policemen out of thousands resigned, and very few schools and colleges lost their pupils. A large number of Indians directly or indirectly depended on the colonial rule for their livelihood, status, identity, and self-respect. A break with it entailed considerable moral, emotional, and economic cost, and only a few could be realistically expected to bear it. Not surprisingly, Gandhi's call for non-cooperation received only a limited response, and even those who had volunteered drifted back.

The Non-cooperation Movement brought to the surface a deeper and important difference between Gandhi and Tagore.³⁷ For Gandhi, politics involved collective action and mass mobilization, and entailed

risks that should be minimized but could not be altogether avoided. Tagore was deeply fearful of all forms of collective action with their inflammatory and dishonest rhetoric, propensity to violence, lack of discipline, and surrender of individual judgement. For him, even Gandhi's movement, though reassuring in some respects, was not altogether free of this pathology. When Gandhi took the unprecedented step of calling off the movement at its height because of the Chauri Chaura incident and imposed a strict moral and organizational discipline on the country, Tagore seems to have felt that Gandhi was aware of and prepared to do something about the problem. Although he never lost his suspicion of mass politics, he seems to have thought that that of Gandhi's kind might provide the basis of a broadly acceptable alternative.

Charkha

The controversy over the boycott of foreign cloth went hand in hand with that over the charkha, which Gandhi had made an important part of his political programme.³⁸ He argued that it gave employment and hence a sense of dignity and self-worth to the poor. It generated an income that at least partially relieved their poverty, and when organized on a commercial scale, it could even provide a decent livelihood. Gandhi went further and urged every Indian to devote at least half an hour a day to spinning as a sacrament and a religious duty. Spinning symbolized the dignity of manual labour and of those engaged in it, a vital consideration in a society that took a dim view of both. It reminded one of the poor man's wants and woes and kept them at the centre of all one's activities. Rather than merely campaign against poverty which cost one nothing, or give money to the poor with its patronizing overtones, one showed deep personal concern for them by exerting oneself in such activity as spinning and giving away its product or proceeds to them. Gandhi thought that if all Indians engaged in spinning and made it a national *yajna* or an act of sacrifice for the whole nation, it would build indissoluble bonds of solidarity across classes, castes, and religions and develop among them a strong sense of community.

In an article provocatively titled 'The Cult of the Charkha' published in September 1925, Tagore mounted a powerful attack on the importance Gandhi gave to spinning.³⁹ He agreed that poverty and unemployment were serious problems but insisted that the answer lay

in industrial development, mechanized agriculture, cooperative farming, and other such progressive measures. Faced with a similar problem in the past, the energetic Europeans had embarked on industrialization, invented new agricultural technology, developed effective forms of social organization, and used their collective energy to dominate the natural world. Rather than follow their lead, Gandhi was asking Indians to engage in such a mechanical, passive, and indolent activity as spinning that kept them at the mercy of nature, and did nothing to develop their intelligence, creativity, and capacity for collective action. Tagore could not see why Gandhi should moralize a purely economic problem by calling foreign cloth impure and the hand-woven pure. He was equally opposed to Gandhi making spinning a moral duty for every Indian. It made no dent on poverty, and there were better ways of showing one's concern for the poor. He chided Gandhi for introducing a new religion or 'cult' devoted to the worship of the 'charkha goddess', yet another deity added to the vast and ever-growing Hindu pantheon. Since he felt that his iconoclastic article would offend Gandhi, he ended it by seeking his understanding and forbearance, and claiming defiantly that if the country could not forgive his disagreement, he was prepared to live with the 'black reality of any stigma of popular disapprobation' to which he and others of his view might be subjected.⁴⁰

Although Gandhi appreciated that Tagore's attack sprang from a deep conviction and reflected his profound unease, he thought that it lacked balance and an adequate grasp of his reasons for advocating the charkha. He acknowledged that Tagore's eloquence had agitated or influenced many of his own associates and that he needed to give him a convincing reply. He reassured Tagore that his frank criticism had pleased him and that such disagreements were common among friends as long as they were free of bitterness as was the case in this instance. He reminded Tagore that he had himself once acknowledged the great economic value of the charkha and signed a public appeal to that effect. Industrial development was certainly necessary, but it had its dangers, and until it was achieved, the poor needed employment and livelihood, which the charkha provided. Their grinding poverty and relentless decay were unbearable and required an immediate response. Spinning was not a solitary activity as Tagore maintained because spinners and weavers could form their own organizations and work together. And it did not need to be mechanical and dull either if the technical quality of

the charkha could be improved. Handwoven and hand-spun cloth was pure because unlike the product of the textile mill, it was not based on exploitation of labour and mechanical drudgery under inhuman factory conditions.

In economic terms, Gandhi's case was weak, and Tagore was right to point it out. Large-scale industrialization was the only way to generate employment and relieve poverty. Spinning and weaving did not measure up to the magnitude of the problem, and could survive only by setting aside a state-protected and even state-subsidized sector of the market with all its attendant problems. Tagore was also right to criticize the culture and the vision of human life associated with the charkha, especially its passivity, repetitive routine, and rejection of the human mastery of the natural environment. He was, however, wrong not to appreciate Gandhi's case for making spinning a moral duty for every Indian. As Gandhi emphasized, it gave dignity to manual labour, reflected a deeply personal response to poverty, placed the poor at the centre of one's life, kept alive the memories of a premodern way of life, introduced a period of solitary reflection in an otherwise hectic life, and built national solidarity.

It is difficult to believe that someone of Tagore's sensitivity could have missed the point of or been wholly unsympathetic to Gandhi's moral case for spinning.⁴¹ It would seem that his attack was inspired by two considerations. First, in his view, spinning had become a national cult accepted on the authority of Gandhi. It was not based on a national consensus formed after a rational debate and perpetuated the old Indian habit of uncritically following a guru. This had to be fought, and Tagore thought he had to give the lead.

Second, Tagore valued individual choice and judgement and wanted every Indian to decide for himself or herself how best to respond to the kinds of moral concerns raised by Gandhi. Some Indians might choose to express their solidarity with the poor and respect for manual labour through the medium of spinning; others might find other ways of doing so. Shared values could be realized in several ways, and in Tagore's view, Gandhi was wrong not to respect their diversity.

Although both were important considerations, they did not invalidate Gandhi's moral case. He had argued for it on several occasions and successfully persuaded millions including Nehru, J.P. Narayan, Aruna Asaf Ali, Acharya Narendra Dev, and others, none of whom was known

for meekly following him. As for Tagore's second concern, Gandhi had said that he was prepared to entertain alternatives to spinning if they served the intended moral and symbolic purposes equally effectively but that neither he nor anyone else had come up with one. The point of spinning was not only to identify with the poor, important as it was, but also to unite all Indians around a common public practice and foster among them a strong sense of solidarity. This called for uniformity and restricted individual choice.⁴²

Bihar Earthquake

When an earthquake struck Bihar in 1934 causing the loss of over 15,000 lives, Gandhi, who was then conducting a vigorous campaign against untouchability, called it a punishment for the sin of untouchability. Like many others, Tagore was furious and wrote a short but powerful article attacking Gandhi. First, and this was his main criticism, Gandhi's view was 'unscientific'. It was a 'truism' that 'physical catastrophes have their inevitable and exclusive origin in certain combination of physical facts'. Since the laws governing them were inexorable and 'God Himself never interferes' with them, natural phenomena must and can only be explained in terms of natural laws. Second, giving moral explanations of natural events implicates God in natural disasters, and implies that he teaches moral conduct through the 'orgies of the worst behaviour possible' towards the innocent and the guilty alike. No earthly ruler behaving like this would be considered moral or civilized. Since God could not possibly be like that, he could have nothing to do with natural disasters. Third, Gandhi's view implied that human beings had the power to 'drag down the structure of creation to ruins'⁴³ by their misdeeds of which untouchability was an egregious example. This was to give human sins and errors an extraordinary power rivalling and even overwhelming that of God. Tagore could not see how this was possible.

Fourth, untouchability was not the only social evil in India nor the greatest. For Tagore, Gandhi could not explain why the perpetrators of other evils had not received divine punishment and why the earthquake killed the untouchables themselves, while sparing their tormentors living a short distance away. Fifth, Gandhi's view opened the floodgates to all kinds of undisciplined speculation. If Gandhi could blame untouchability for the earthquake, his opponents could with equal even greater

cogency blame his campaign against it, especially as the earthquake had occurred during the course of it and was in the eyes of the orthodox Brahmins more likely to provoke divine anger. Gandhi would have no defence against them and risked undermining his great cause. Finally, the propensity to blind faith and superstitious beliefs had long been an Indian weakness. Rather than fight it, as a great leader should do, Gandhi reinforced it and did a grave long-term damage in the pursuit of a no doubt worthwhile short-term goal.

Gandhi was unrepentant. He said he had spoken 'with the greatest deliberation' and with total conviction.⁴⁴ He knew his view would invite ridicule, but it would have been untruthful and cowardly not to express it. Since he had a profound regard for Tagore, he had read his statement three times without being persuaded by it. His basic difficulty was with Tagore's view that natural phenomena must be explained in terms of natural laws. This implied that the natural world was self-contained, immune to the influence of anything outside it, and amoral in nature, a view a religious person like him could not accept. Since God regulated the universe, nothing in it could happen without his will; including and especially in the natural world where there was no free will to deflect God's will. The natural world was certainly governed by natural laws, which the scientist aimed to discover. But that could not be the end of the matter. These laws were not accidental or sprang from nowhere; they were part of a purposive divine order, which regulated their operations. Since the scientific inquiry could not answer these legitimate questions about their purpose and mode of working, speculation or guess work was justified.

Even if one was able to reconcile the autonomy of the natural world with a belief in the divine governance of the universe, Gandhi thought that the problem remained. Tagore's view disjoined matter and spirit—the natural world and the moral and spiritual world created by human beings. Gandhi found this difficult to accept. For him, all things in the universe were interconnected, and spirit and matter could not be disjoined. Spirit was matter 'rarefied to the utmost limit' and whatever happened to either must have a direct or indirect effect on the other.⁴⁵ While replying to Tagore, he turned to Kakasaheb Kalelkar, a distinguished thinker who shared Tagore's view and whom Gandhi held in high esteem. Gandhi asked him if the universe was 'one unit', a coherent whole, or a pluriverse made up of autonomous and unrelated levels

of existence.⁴⁶ Kalelkar felt sure that the former was the case. Gandhi rejoined that in that case he could not deny that the moral and natural worlds must be connected and that the former must have some effect on the functioning of the natural world even as the latter had on it. Kalelkar said that though he could not deny such a conclusion, Gandhi was wrong to relate the Bihar earthquake specifically to the practice of untouchability. Gandhi said that once his basic point that the natural and moral worlds were connected was conceded, it was only a 'minor matter'⁴⁷ whether the earthquake was related to untouchability or to something else.

Emboldened by this exchange, Gandhi pressed the point publicly in his reply to Tagore: The physical and moral worlds were not totally separate. They influenced each other though we did not know how. The nature and form of their interaction was a 'profound mystery', which highlighted the limits of the existing scientific knowledge and invited us to press our inquiry further. Tagore's assertion that the natural world was autonomous not only foreclosed such an inquiry but was itself based on faith in just the same way as Gandhi's opposite belief was. Since Gandhi's belief was not inherently implausible or irrational, it was not a 'superstition' as Tagore called it but an act of faith. After all, both he and Tagore believed in God, though neither could prove his existence. The faith in the interaction between the natural and the moral world was no different.

Having made his general point, Gandhi argued that although he could not specifically connect the Bihar earthquake to the practice of untouchability, he could not be certain that there was no connection.⁴⁸ Since the two could be related, we would be wise to 'learn the moral lesson from the event and repent for that sin'. Even if his belief turned out to be 'ill-founded', it would at least have 'done good' by spurring us to mount an even more vigorous campaign against untouchability. For Gandhi, 'every physical catastrophe' should be used as an occasion for critical self-reflection and further moral improvement. God would not kill and destroy without a purpose, and the latter could only be 'just retribution for our sins'.

Gandhi's reply to Tagore's other criticisms was brief. He said he did not share Tagore's belief that human sins could not undermine the structure of creation. Since the moral and natural worlds were connected, human sins had more power to do so than mere physical

phenomenon. As to why the tragedy struck Bihar and not any other part of India, why there should be divine punishment for untouchability and not for other sins, and so on, he did not have the answer; I am not God, he said reassuringly. The fact that he did not have answers to these questions did not, however, mean that none existed or might not be offered in future. Tagore had said that the Sanatanists could blame Gandhi and his campaign against untouchability for the earthquake. Gandhi replied they had a perfect right to do so and that it was up to their countrymen to decide which cause was more likely to invite divine wrath and which speculation to trust. So far as encouraging the superstitious habits of his countrymen was concerned, a charge that seems to have stung Gandhi, which is why he called his reply to Tagore 'Superstition vs. Faith', he said he had done no such thing. His view was not a superstition, a blind and irrational belief that went against reason, but rather an act of faith, which though not mandated by reason was nevertheless allowed or permitted by it.⁴⁹

Gandhi's defence of his view raised more questions than it answered. His belief in the unity of matter and spirit or the natural and moral worlds rests on the assumption that the universe is a single and tightly knit whole whose parts are all necessarily interrelated. There is no basis for such an assumption, and Gandhi provides none other than that this is his innermost conviction, too feeble a foundation on which to build a general view of the world. One can argue with equal, even greater, cogency that we live in a pluriverse, made up of different and in some cases autonomous orders of being and levels of reality.

Gandhi's other arguments were no better. He ignored Tagore's point about why God cannot find better ways of teaching good behaviour than through a horrendous loss of lives, and why divine punishment should be meted out to the innocent and the guilty alike and be disproportionate to the gravity of the sins. To say that we do not understand the working of the divine mind and must acknowledge our limitations is hardly an answer. It sanctions all manner of beliefs and provides no criteria to assess their validity. Gandhi himself says that faith should not go against reason. Since divine punishment in the form of natural disasters is too indiscriminate and disproportionate to meet the principles of natural justice, the belief in it fails to pass Gandhi's own test. To moralize a natural disaster and view it as punishment is to justify it and blunt one's response to it. It might lead one to greater moral introspection as

Gandhi urged, but it could also lead to indifference and acquiescence. Gandhi's argument that his view was justified because, among other things, it served a great cause rested on a largely instrumental view of beliefs and encouraged a loose way of thinking that Tagore rightly castigated.

Although Gandhi's reply to Tagore was deeply unsatisfactory, it raised an important point that could not be easily brushed aside. A religious person who believes in the divine governance of the universe cannot accept the explanatory and ontological self-sufficiency of the natural world. For him, the world is what it is because there is a purpose to it, and mechanical causality, valid at one level, is embedded in some kind of teleological order. In order to argue that the natural world is governed by its own laws and that natural disasters have no moral significance, one must step outside the religious framework, take a limited view of God's power, or somehow dissociate or at least distance him from the natural world. Gandhi did none of this, and hence his deep perplexity in the face of the Bihar earthquake and its misguided explanation.

Although Tagore was right to criticize Gandhi, his own position was not without its difficulties. For him too, the universe was God's creation, and God was ceaselessly at work in it, making it an increasingly better medium of self-expression. While he could argue that it was governed by its own laws, he could not stop there and needed to ask the further question how these laws, and the natural disasters which he explained in terms of them, fitted into God's design and related to his ceaseless struggle to make the natural world a better place. While rightly rejecting Gandhi's answer, Tagore could not dismiss his question.

Although Tagore did not directly address the question, he hinted at an answer. He seemed to suggest that while God means well and intends to create a better world, his power to do so is limited. The material world is recalcitrant, and the divine power is unable to bend it to its will. It is not obvious that such an answer is more 'scientific' or even more persuasive than Gandhi's. Tagore gives no evidence for the view that God means well or is ceaselessly striving to make the world a better place when natural disasters and other forms of evil have persisted unabated since its origin. He is also being highly selective in attributing the harmony and beauty of the natural world to God but not its ugliness and evil, in seeing the former as expressions of the

divine play and thus spiritualizing them while treating the latter as wholly natural. In short, Tagore's view is incoherent and involves faith just as Gandhi's does. It is certainly less credulous and less vulnerable to dubious social and political interpretations, and in that sense, it is better but not more 'rational' or 'scientific'.

Ram Mohun Roy

Both Tagore and Gandhi placed great value on intellectual openness and intercultural dialogue, and even considered it to be one of the defining features of the Indian civilization. The two, however, differed in their views on how the dialogue was to be conducted and what its goal was. These differences were reflected in their attitudes to Ram Mohun Roy, one of its most influential advocates. Indeed this was one of the few occasions when their exchange had an uncharacteristic tone of bitterness, particularly on Tagore's part.

Tagore held Roy in the highest esteem and called him a 'giant'. Roy, for him, lived at a time when Western civilization was beginning to exercise a hegemonic influence on India and threatening its ways of thought and life. The frightened Indians turned inward and sought to keep the West out. For Tagore this was 'the cry of fear ..., of weakness... of the dwarf'. To his enormous credit, Roy courageously resisted this tendency. Proud of his civilization and enjoying the 'full inheritance of the Indian wisdom',⁵⁰ he sought to understand the guiding spirit and deepest aspirations of the Western civilization, and aimed to achieve a synthesis of the best in both in just the same way that earlier Indian thinkers had done when confronted with the challenges of Buddhism and Islam.

Gandhi took a somewhat different view of Roy. He agreed with Tagore that Roy had inaugurated a great reform movement in Bengal and had a marvellous effect on its society. Indeed when judged against the obstacles he had to overcome in the colonial context, he was a 'giant'. Gandhi, however, thought that his impact was not as permanent and far reaching as that of Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, and Guru Gobind Singh. It was limited to Bengal, gave rise to an influential but small sect of Brahmos, appealed only to the elite, and brought about no profound changes in the ways of thought and life of ordinary men and women.⁵¹ When 'compared' with Kabir and others, he was a lesser

figure, a pigmy, a word Gandhi unwisely used in an unguarded remark to a questioner and which deeply offended and angered Tagore. Tagore attacked Gandhi for trying to cry down a great personality of modern India and even accused Gandhi of 'growing enamoured of his own doctrines, which is a dangerous form of egotism, that even great people suffer from at times'.⁵² Although Tagore sometimes took offence too easily, it is difficult to think of another occasion when he had attacked any Indian leader, let alone Gandhi, in this way.

For Gandhi, Roy's impact was limited because his ideas did not resonate with the masses. And that was so not only because he did not write in their language and address their concerns but primarily because he was in awe of the West and sought to mould his religion and society in its image.⁵³ For him, Christianity was the paradigm of a true religion and his own had to be reformed along its lines. He did not care for popular Hinduism, stressed only its Upanishadic and elite forms, and gave them a Christian orientation as seen in the Brahmo rituals and practices. For Roy, again, one could develop the idea of liberty and accuracy of thought only through the medium of the English language and by acquiring modern Western education. This was why he took a low view of Indian languages, Sanskrit studies, and the indigenous system of education, and urged the colonial government to use its resources to promote Western education. For Gandhi, although Roy valued some aspects of the Indian society and civilization, on the whole he did not think much of it, which was why he repeatedly stressed the great benefits of close contacts with the European people and civilization, and even pleaded for colonization by European settlers in the hope that their energy and enterprise would regenerate India.⁵⁴ In Gandhi's view, this was not unique to Roy. Many contemporary reformers including Dayananda Saraswati remained under the overpowering influence of the West, saw India through its eyes, borrowed from it all too hastily, and ended up undermining the integrity of the very civilization they professed to safeguard.

Gandhi was echoing here the views of Vivekananda, Ranade, and other critical traditionalists. Vivekananda distinguished between two different forms of change that he called reform and growth. 'I do not believe in reform; I believe in growth'.⁵⁵ In the former, one borrowed one's ideas and ideals from an external source, and judged and changed one's society accordingly. One's approach was inevitably censorious,

condemnatory, lecturing one's people, calling them all kinds of names, and asking them to become someone else. Since it made people feel slighted and demeaned, reform left behind a trail of anger and hatred. By contrast, growth was internal, organic, and built on a society's own heritage. One acknowledged its deficiencies without losing sight of its strengths and, although one was stimulated by and willing to learn from others, one's focus was on mobilizing its own critical resources rather than turning it into something else. Advocates of growth had 'no curse on their lips', and relied on gentle persuasion and coaxing. While reform amounted to anglicization and imitation, growth involved regeneration or self-purification. Both were progressive, but their methods and approaches were very different. Gandhi was deeply influenced by this view and even borrowed its language. For him, Roy's limitations derived from the fact that he was an ardent advocate of reform rather than growth or internally generated change.

Like Roy, Gandhi valued intercultural dialogue, but his views on its conduct and objectives differed. For Gandhi, a culture belonged to the people—its historical carrier and transmitter. If it was to be effective and meaningful, an intercultural dialogue must involve them as active participants, and should not be confined to the elite and conducted in their abstract and popularly inaccessible language. For Gandhi, Kabir and Nanak had done this but not Roy. Furthermore, Gandhi insisted that in an intercultural dialogue one should take one's own culture as one's starting point and reach out to the other from within it. Unless one knew one's culture well, one did not know what in the other was relevant to and could be usefully adopted by it. Starting in the opposite way, as Roy and others in his view had done, posed the grave risk of seeing one's culture through the eyes of the 'other' and misunderstanding it. For Gandhi, the point of the dialogue was for each culture to enrich and regenerate itself by internal criticism and judicious borrowing, not to aim as was the case with Roy at some grand and abstract synthesis leading to a new and allegedly superior universal culture.

It is not necessary for us to inquire whether and how far Gandhi's criticism of Roy was justified. The relevant point is why it angered and provoked a fierce reaction from Tagore. Several factors seem to have played a part. Tagore was a Brahmo and seems to have thought that Gandhi's criticism of Roy was directly or indirectly aimed at the Brahmo Samaj and Tagore himself. The fact that Gandhi explicitly

referred to Tagore's Brahmo connections, and the further fact that the personal relations between the two at the time were somewhat tense, lent credibility to Tagore's suspicion. This could not, however, have been a major factor because Gandhi had also paid a handsome tribute to the Brahmo contribution to the regeneration of Bengal and singled out Tagore as its finest product.

Tagore seems to have felt that Gandhi had misunderstood Roy and done him great injustice. Roy was not a mere pupil or imitator of the West. He not only admired it but also stressed its limitations, and while criticizing his own civilization, he also appreciated its strengths. For Tagore, Roy thus confronted the West as an equal and sought to synthesize the best of the two civilizations. In this crucial respect, he thought that Roy was no different from Nanak and Kabir with whom Gandhi had unfavourably compared him. Although they had a mass following which Roy did not have, his influence, initially limited to the elite, had in Tagore's view eventually permeated the masses and brought about profound changes in the popular consciousness of not only Bengal but also most of the rest of India. Tagore thought that since Gandhi had failed to appreciate this, he needed to set the record straight.

The fact that Tagore's view of intercultural dialogue differed from Gandhi's in several important respects and was closer to, though not the same as, Roy's also played a part. For Gandhi, the dialogue involved cautious probing and borrowing, reaching out to the other in a 'discriminating conservative spirit'.⁵⁶ For Tagore, as for Roy, it was a full-blooded intellectual and moral encounter conducted with a fully open mind. For Gandhi, the point of the dialogue was for each culture to enrich itself by learning what was valuable and assimilable in the other. Like Roy, Tagore thought this too timid and wanted the dialogue to aim at *samanvaya* or synthesis, a richer and more universal culture that went beyond the existing ones. Gandhi's criticism of Roy seemed to Tagore to challenge the validity of his own intellectual project and needed a robust response. Roy was an unintended site where the deeper differences between the two on this and related subjects got played out.

The debates between Gandhi and Tagore had all the elements one expects in great debates. They dealt with issues of the highest

importance; involved passionately held beliefs; displayed great forensic skills; threw up memorable phrases; and were marked by mutual respect, intellectual generosity, clarity, eloquence, and courage. Not surprisingly, they gripped the attention of the country and were subjects of discussion in countless formal and informal settings. Along with several such debates between other Indian leaders, they helped build a rich tradition of public discourse in India.

Although the Gandhi–Tagore debates centred on concrete issues, they raised in one form or another several large questions such as their views on modernity, visions of India, and conceptions of human life in general. The debate on non-cooperation was basically about India's response to modernity as mediated by the colonial rule. That on the charkha had a similar thrust, though it also involved the important question of how to foster a sense of common concern and forge bonds of collective solidarity. The debate on the Bihar earthquake was ultimately about the integrity of modern science and critical rationality. And the one on Roy, superficially about assessing the historical influence of great individuals, was at a deeper level about the interplay of cultural embeddedness and intercultural openness and dialogue.

The debates showed how much Tagore and Gandhi shared in common as well as their deep differences. In the absence of the former, they would have disagreed far more than they did and would not have understood each other as well as they did or held each other in such high esteem. If they had not been separated by deep differences, they would not have disagreed so often, so strongly, and so publicly. What they shared and where they differed were closely intertwined and could not be separated or assigned to different areas. It is because they, for example, agreed on the importance of cultural openness that they cared deeply about the nature and purpose of intercultural dialogue as seen in their disagreements on Ram Mohun Roy and the Non-cooperation Movement. And it is because they deeply cherished India's plural civilization that they quarrelled over how to define and nurture its plurality in the colonial context.

Although the differences between Gandhi and Tagore sprang from several sources such as their different cultural backgrounds and spheres of activity, one of the most important had to do with their different ideals of human excellence. Gandhi's vision of life was intensely moral, even moralistic, and centred on the related ideas of total dedication to

the service of fellow humans, strong self-discipline, and self-mastery. By contrast, Tagore took an aesthetic, playful, celebratory, and joyous view of human life. Self-discipline mattered to him but not constant self-policing and pursuit of self-mastery. And he valued the service of fellow men but did not make it the centre of moral life. Gandhi marginalized the intellectual, literary, aesthetic, and other achievements of the human spirit; Tagore had only a limited place for the unending struggle against injustices and collective action.

These differences were evident not only in the debates discussed earlier but also in several other areas which they did not consider important enough to merit a public disagreement. For Tagore, the Taj Mahal was a permanent and poignant symbol of a man's love for his beloved and worthy of adoration. For Gandhi, it was a waste of money that should have been used to help the poor, exploitative of human labour, and a self-indulgent public display of a private emotion. For Tagore, the rich and complex Mahābhārata was the 'great epic of the soul of our people'⁵⁷ and the multidimensional Krishna symbolized much of what was magnificent in human life. Gandhi preferred the Rāmāyana and saw in Rama, the righteous *maryādā puruṣa*, the paradigm of humanity. They even differed about the humble *puris* where frying violated and vitiated the grain for Gandhi but brought out its potential for Tagore.⁵⁸

Since the two visions of human life have different orientations, they cannot be integrated into a harmonious whole or one of them judged superior to the other. Their very differences, however, make them excellent conversational partners, each highlighting what is missing in the other and offering a valuable corrective. Without violating the integrity of their visions and within the limits set by them, Tagore can be Gandhianized and enriched, even as Gandhi can be Tagorized and rendered more persuasive. This is what many of their contemporaries including Nehru did.⁵⁹ Drawn to both but wholly at ease with neither, they committed themselves to one of them and reached out to the other from within that perspective, becoming a living and lively conversation between the elements borrowed from both.

AMBEDKAR AND THE PURSUIT OF FRATERNITY

Ambedkar was one of the most talented thinkers of twentieth-century India. From extremely humble origins, he rose to be the most highly educated Indian leader of all time, with an MA and a PhD from Columbia University, a DSc from the London School of Economics, and a Bar-at-Law from Gray's Inn, London. He wrote more scholarly books than most other Indian leaders and that too without the forced leisure offered by the prison, which many of them devoted to reading and writing. His *Collected Writings and Speeches*¹ run into over a dozen bulky tonnes and still exclude much. He continued his research and writing until the very end of his life. *The Buddha and his Dhamma*,² on which he was working until a day before he died, is a text of impressive scholarship. It explores Buddhism from an activist perspective, gives new though sometimes unconvincing meanings to the ideas of karma, *dukkha*, and nirvāna, and represents an ingenious attempt to construct a coherent Buddhist social and political philosophy relevant to contemporary India.³

Ambedkar was also one of the major architects of the Indian Constitution. When the Drafting Committee of seven members lost half of them through death, resignation, or long absences, he took over the additional responsibility and carried on its work with great energy. Although the Constitution was framed within the limits set by the consensus prevailing in the Constituent Assembly and did not represent Ambedkar's own long-held views on several important issues, it

could not have been what it is without his labours.⁴ He also drafted and piloted the Hindu Code Bill through the Parliament and, although the delay in its passage disappointed him and led to his resignation, what emerged in the end carries his imprint. He set up several institutions of higher education, and saw to it that they flourished, represented his views on education, and contributed to the uplift of the Dalits.

Thanks to the causes for which he fought and the manner in which he did so, he was much underrated and even maligned during his lifetime. Gandhi did not seek him out until August 1931, nearly 16 years after Ambedkar had been in public life, and took a highly patronizing attitude to him in his first interview. He even mistook him for a Brahmin and discovered his real identity only during the Second Round Table Conference!⁵ Pandit Nehru did not meet him until as late as October 1939 and did not think much of him. M.R. Jaykar thought that he was a 'destructive' force bent on creating what Jaykar called 'Maharistan', a separate land for the Mahars broadly along the lines of Pakistan. Subhas Chandra Bose expressed a widely held view when he observed that 'Ambedkar had had his leadership thrust upon him by the benign British government because his services were necessary to embarrass the nationalist leaders'.⁶ Some other leaders of the Independence movement such as C. Rajagopalachari and K. Santhanam were even more unkind in their assessment of him. Even today, many see him as a one-eyed man who could not look beyond the interests of the Dalits and allowed his great talents to be misdirected, even distorted, by his hatred of Hindu society and its most well-meaning leaders. Some resent that like Jinnah, he was a political free rider who acquired power without making the obligatory sacrifices for the independence of the country such as getting beaten up by the police and going to prison.

As I argue later, many of these criticisms are largely misguided. However, Ambedkar was not an easy person to understand and deal with. His intellectual arrogance and dismissive attitude to those who disagreed with him hurt and alienated them. He was unduly aggressive in his attacks on Gandhi, and did not fully appreciate his complex style of operation and the constraints under which he had to function. If Dhananjay Keer is right, he was in private conversations contemptuous of Pandit Nehru, whom he called a 'fourth standard boy'⁷ and 'just another Brahmin'.⁸ He was equally dismissive of the Congress which he, with some justification, called a Brahmin-Bania party, of several

untouchable leaders whom he dismissed as Congress stooges, and the communists whom he dismissed as 'just a bunch of Brahmin boys'. He sometimes took perverse pride in telling the colonial government how much it owed to the support of the untouchables and why it should look after their interests. In his letter to Lord Alexander on 14 May 1946, he reminded him, apparently without any sense of unease, that the British rule 'owes its very existence to the help rendered by the untouchables',⁹ who had not only formed the 'bulk of the army that helped them conquer India' but also saved it when it was 'menaced by a powerful combination of native forces in the Mutiny of 1857', not the kind of remark likely to endear him to his countrymen including those otherwise sympathetic to him.

While Ambedkar bears some responsibility, much of the underestimation of his great contribution was and is due to several factors such as a deep and sometimes wilful misunderstanding of his ideas, casteist prejudices, and resentment against his attack on the Hindu society and Gandhi. Although Ambedkar worked closely, sometimes too closely, with the British government, he was no less patriotic and committed to India's Independence than other leader including Gandhi as he showed by his words and actions on several occasions. Unlike many of them, however, he drew an important distinction between independence of the country and independence of its people. As he once said, words such as society, state, and country were amorphous and deeply ambiguous. They sounded like homogeneous units but in fact contained different classes and castes with their conflicting interests, and should be examined not philosophically but sociologically. An independent India might mean little more than transfer of power from one set of masters to another, and make no difference to and even worsen the condition of the oppressed classes. Ambedkar therefore insisted that the latter could not be expected to throw their weight behind the Independence movement unless the Congress made an explicit commitment to their cause and agreed to necessary institutional safeguards and policies. He rightly argued that what he called the weapon of nationalism was often used to equate the majority with the country as a whole, and to marginalize minority interests and views. He was also right to insist that the question of untouchability was not just a social question like child marriage or a ban on widow remarriage as Gandhi and others had argued. It was fundamentally an

economic and a political problem requiring a radical restructuring of not just the Hindu but also the entire Indian society.

While for these and other reasons Ambedkar unjustifiably remained a controversial and grudgingly admired figure for long, the pendulum began to swing to the other extreme from the 1980s onwards. Largely as a result of a better historical perspective offered by the passage of time, continuing atrocities against the Dalits even after over sixty years of Independence, and the growing intellectual and political visibility of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and the Scheduled Castes (SCs), he is now almost deified in some circles. Some Dalit spokesmen compare him to the Buddha and Prophet Mohammed, and find even the mildest criticism of him intolerable as was evident during the recent silly controversy over his sixty-year old cartoon in an NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) textbook. His statues, portraits, posters bearing his image, and schools and parks named after him have proliferated across many states of India. His finely framed photos in immaculate Western attire are lovingly garlanded and placed in prominent places. It is suggestive of the Dalit view of him and their place in the Indian society that he appears in a Western dress while most other leaders' statues and photos are in traditional dresses, and is generally presented as carrying a copy of the Indian Constitution with its obvious implications that he is its sole author and that it is an instrument of Dalit liberation. In some parts of India, there is a competition to build bigger and bigger statues of him. All this is perfectly understandable and, within limits, even proper. It is one way in which the long-suppressed communities express their pride in the achievements of someone who did so much for them for so long at such a high personal price. It also fosters a sense of collective solidarity among them and strengthens their resolve to fight for a better life. In any case, such worshipful adoration is not limited to Ambedkar. Gandhi has long been a recipient of it, as have Nehru and his descendants, and it is part of the traditional Indian practice of honouring men and women of great qualities or *vibhutis*, remembering them daily and drawing inspiration and strength from them.

While the adoration of Ambedkar is understandable, it has its dangers. It reduces him to a Dalit spokesman and diminishes his stature as a great national and international thinker and leader. It is striking that as his life was coming to an end, another great minority leader in the shape of

Martin Luther King Jr was emerging in the US. Although both had similar concerns and did much for their communities, Ambedkar was in some respects a deeper thinker and had a greater impact on his community and country than Martin Luther King had on his. And yet, while King enjoys an iconic international status, much admired and even revered the world over by those fighting for minority rights, Ambedkar sadly remains a local and rather dated figure partly because of India's comparatively low political and intellectual visibility in the world, partly because of the tendency to reduce him one-dimensionally to a Dalit spokesman, and partly because of the failure to reinterpret his thought in a creative and critical manner. Just as no one thinks of Nehru as a Brahmin leader and Gandhi as a Bania, there is no reason to think of Ambedkar as a Dalit leader. He certainly fought for Dalits and wrote about them, but he was also concerned about other communities and issues. To suggest that his intellectual and political identity is defined or exhausted by his caste is to reflect the very casteism he vigorously attacked. Like the Gujaratis who never made a proprietary claim on Gandhi or even Sardar Patel and the Bengalis who have over time come to share Tagore with the rest of India, the Dalits need to release their grip over Ambedkar in his, their, and the country's interest.

Uncritical adoration of Ambedkar discourages Dalits from a critical engagement with his thought. It denies his historicity, the fact that he thought and acted in a particular historical context, and turns him into a timeless figure whose ideas do not need to be contextualized and adapted to changing historical circumstances. Above all, such adoration goes against his own advice, diminishes him, and does him grave injustice. Ambedkar was and saw himself as an iconoclast, who took nothing for granted on authority and demanded a consistent and critical interrogation of inherited dogmas. As he remarked in 1933 when he was praised by his grateful followers in superlative terms, 'You are deifying a common man like me. These ideas of hero worship will bring ruin on you if you do not nip them in the bud.'¹⁰ He put it even more bluntly in his winding-up speech in the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949: 'In India, Bhakti plays a part in politics which is unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. Bhakti in religion may be the road to the salvation of a soul, but in politics Bhakti or hero worship is a sure road to degradation and eventual dictatorship.'¹¹ As Ambedkar said of the

Buddha, the latter was not a '*mokshadātā* (saviour) but a *mārgadātā* (guide)'.¹² Buddha only showed the way, and left it to his followers to decide whether the destination was right, the path correct, and at what pace to travel along it. It was because, among other things, Buddhism was non-authoritarian and non-dogmatic that Ambedkar said he was drawn to it in the first instance.

Ambedkar had an open mind and changed his views on several subjects when required to do so by arguments or evidence. In the 1920s, he thought that the Manusmriti sanctioned, even enjoined, untouchability. Hence on 24 December 1927, he burnt a copy of Manusmriti, it must be said, not alone but along with a Brahmin friend G.N. Sahasrabuddhe. As he thought further about the historical causes of untouchability and undertook a detailed study of the Dharmashāstras, he took a different view. He argued in *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables*,¹³ that Manusmriti was written before the rise of untouchability and could not have sanctioned let alone enjoined it. Ambedkar associated the rise of untouchability with a ban on cow slaughter and beef eating, neither of which was prohibited by Manu.

Ambedkar changed his views on several other subjects as well, such as whether independent India should opt for socialism and enshrine it in the Constitution, the importance of temple entry, whether the untouchables should engage in a nationwide civil rights movement and whether the likely violence was justified. He also changed his views on whether they should campaign for their own segregated villages and how they should cooperate with other backward castes. This does not mean that he was inconsistent or confused, though that too was the case sometimes, but rather that as his insights into these and related matters deepened or the historical circumstances changed, he appreciated that his goals and principles called for different strategies.

The best and fairest way to respond to Ambedkar is neither to marginalize nor to deify him, neither to dehistoricize him nor to reduce him one dimensionally to Gandhi's sparring partner, but rather to judge him in his own terms and context and interrogate his ideas and actions. We need to elucidate, re-examine, and even question the questions he asked; challenge what is dubious in his answers; and build on his profound insights. Such an approach shows that we consider him big enough to be worthy of a critical engagement and relevant to our

concerns. This is how Gandhi, Nehru, and others are being currently reassessed, and that is what I do in the rest of this essay.

Untouchability

Although Ambedkar's intellectual interests covered a wide range including religion, philosophy, political theory, sociology, social psychology, history, and economics, the practice of untouchability in all its tragic complexity was one of their major unifying themes. It was also the prism through which he looked at Hindu society, and brought to it the insights of his personal experiences and various disciplinary perspectives. For Ambedkar, untouchability was a product of the uniquely Hindu form of inequality as embodied in the caste system. He examined the structure of the caste system, the way in which it differed from other kinds of inequality, how it was sustained for centuries, and how it shaped the Hindu self-consciousness. He asked whether untouchability was adventitious or integral to the caste system, and how it originated, was maintained, and could be ended. He asked the related question of why caste Hindus had not felt ashamed of or even embarrassed by it and continued it for centuries without significant opposition. Indeed Ambedkar was struck by the fact that there was no critical discourse on the history and development of untouchability during the entire history of Hindu society. He thought that this was so because Hindu thinkers took it to be self-evident or part of the natural order of things, and he asked why they held such a view.

While inequality, be it social, political, or economic, was to be found in all societies, caste system represented its historically unique form. For Ambedkar, it had six distinguishing features.¹⁴ First, it was based on birth, articulated into neatly demarcated and self-contained groups, and followed their members until their death. Second, self-contained castes were not distinct social groups like classes and tribes but were embedded in and formed part of a wider social whole which graded and related them in a hierarchical manner. Third, the ideas of purity and pollution lay at the centre of caste hierarchy. Hierarchy itself was common to many unequal societies but one involving purity and pollution was unique to the Hindus. Higher castes felt defiled and their social standing was lowered in their own and others' eyes when they mixed with the lower ones, especially in such culturally significant

areas as commensuality and marriage. Castes were like 'closed corporations', had no meaningful contacts with each other, shared no common experiences, and remained rigid and inflexible.

Fourth, each caste had a name which gave 'it fixity, continuity and individuality'.¹⁵ It was unambiguously bounded, was internally homogeneous, and had public marks of identification. It was even carried over into the surnames of its members who could not therefore hide it and hope to pass as someone else. All this made caste inequality easy to enforce, difficult to escape, and highly oppressive.

Fifth, inequality in Hindu society was minutely graded. It was not like two or more unequal and sharply separated groups facing each other in their stark hostility as in a feudal or modern bourgeois society but was rather an elaborate and carefully delineated hierarchy based on 'an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt'.¹⁶ Every caste had some castes that were superior and others that were inferior to it. Even the untouchables had their untouchables and their own internal hierarchy. Since the contours of inequality were blurred, it did not appear stark and unbearable as it did in a slave-owning or racially or class-divided society. Every caste could live with its inferior status and the contempt it entailed because it found compensating satisfaction in enjoying and exercising its superiority over others. Such a minutely graded system made it exceedingly difficult for the oppressed groups to unite, let alone take a holistic view of, and mount a challenge to the entire social order.

Finally, according to Ambedkar, caste profoundly shaped the Hindu's identity or sense of himself. He defined himself in terms of his place in the hierarchy, and could not think of and relate to others without viewing them as superior or inferior to him. And if he ever sought to establish some kind of equality with them, he did so by seeing them as superior in some and inferior in some other real or imaginary respects. The consciousness of hierarchy had struck such deep roots in the Hindu psyche, argued Ambedkar, that they were incapable of entertaining the closely related ideas of unique individuals sharing a common humanity. Since Hindu inequality was not just a matter of social but also personal identity, it had a social and a psychological basis, and required the resources of both sociology and social psychology to understand and undermine its continuing hold.

For Ambedkar, inequality in this exceedingly complex form was the organizing principle of Hindu society. As he put it in moments of

despair, 'Hindu, thy name is inequality'.¹⁷ To be a Hindu was to belong to a particular caste, and that involved getting caught up in a system of inequality. One could not escape the system of inequality without escaping the caste, and one could do the latter only by ceasing to be a Hindu. In some of his writings, Ambedkar thought that the caste system could be eradicated within the Hindu framework.¹⁸ In others, he argued the opposite that since the Hindu society was structured in terms of the caste system, to destroy the latter was to put an end to the Hindu society itself. It would create a new society but that would not be Hindu.

Ambedkar's extreme view made sense only if one accepted his identification of the Hindu society with the caste system and defined the Hindu in exclusively social terms. There are no good reasons to do either. Several Hindu thinkers over the centuries thought that the caste system was a historical excrescence, a product of invasion and migration or imposed by the Brahmins, and not central to their society. They rejected it without ceasing to be Hindus in their own or even others' eyes. And if castes were to disappear one day as they show signs of doing, Hindus would not cease to be Hindus. Furthermore, one can define the Hindu, as many have done, in civilizational, religious, or cultural rather than social terms, as one who subscribes to a particular view of man and the world or to a particular moral and religious tradition rather than as someone belonging to a particular kind of social order. A Hindu could then reject the caste system without ceasing to be one as is the case with millions of them today.

In Ambedkar's view, the practice of untouchability was an inevitable product of the caste system. The latter involved hierarchy and the untouchables occupied its lowest rung. The caste system involved purity and pollution, and the untouchables represented the most impure group whose contact brought the highest degree of pollution. In these and other ways, untouchability was the concentrated expression of the spirit informing the caste system. The two were inseparable, and untouchability could not be abolished without abolishing the caste system and radically restructuring the very basis of the Hindu social order.

Ambedkar traced the origins of untouchability between 200 and 600 CE. He rejected the widely held view that it was pre-Aryan, and explained its origin in terms of the Brahmanic struggle for domination. When different groups of Indo-Aryans came to India, they settled down in villages. As new ones arrived and fought for land, those defeated were

pushed outside their villages and segregated and subordinated. Many of these 'broken men' converted to Buddhism. The dominant Brahmanic groups who felt threatened by and fought against Buddhism sought to bring the 'broken men' within their fold. When they resisted, the Brahmins devised ways of humiliating and degrading them by placing them outside the pale of normal social intercourse and declaring them untouchable. The latter ate meat including beef. Although the Brahmins used to do the same, they became vegetarians and made it a mark of purity and status. Over time, eating meat, especially beef, became the strongest taboo, and those engaged in it came to be seen as the lowest of the lowly or the untouchables.¹⁹ As to why the 'broken' men did not give up beef, Ambedkar argued that they were extremely poor and survived on dead cows whom no one else would eat. Like other Hindu practices, the ban on beef was a case of using culture to legitimize domination. The real motive behind the practice of untouchability was political, to subdue the 'broken men', eliminate potential competitors for resources, and to declare a war on the Buddhists.

Ambedkar explained the continued existence of untouchability for nearly two millennia in terms of three interacting factors—the ideological, the economic, and the political. Untouchability was justified as a just desert for deeds done in the previous life, and its victims were conditioned into thinking that their social position was their own fault. Caste Hindus also wielded enormous economic power, which they used to exploit and keep the untouchables in degrading and dehumanizing conditions. As Ambedkar put it, untouchability was a 'gold mine' for caste Hindus.²⁰ It provided cheap and abundant labour to do the dirty work and protected upper castes from competition by limiting the supply of talented people. The Brahmin 'enslaves the mind and the Bania enslaves the body', and their deadly alliance throughout history crippled and crushed their victims. Finally, caste Hindus controlled the institutions of government and enforced their will by imposing the most horrendous forms of punishment for even the smallest deviations from caste norms and the feeblest expressions of defiance.

Ambedkar asked why caste Hindus never protested against or even felt embarrassed by the practice of untouchability. In his view, several factors played a part. Like the untouchables, caste Hindus shared the dominant ideology and its justification of untouchability in terms of the doctrine of karma. 'Hindus observe caste not because they are

inhuman or wrong-headed. They observe caste because they are deeply religious.' Furthermore, their hierarchical sense of identity led them to create a system in which one can be 'somebody' only if others are 'nobodies', the lowest of whom were the untouchables. Their economic and political interests too pulled in the same direction. Another extremely important factor had to do with the absence of what Ambedkar called 'public conscience', that is, 'conscience which becomes agitated at every wrong, no matter who is the sufferer' and 'leads an individual to join the struggle to remove that wrong'.²¹ Public conscience was the product of what Ambedkar called fellow feeling, fraternity, a sense of concern for one's fellow human beings in general and for the members of one's society in particular. Thanks to the caste system, which fragmented society into self-contained and mutually indifferent groups, such a fellow feeling did not develop among the Hindus. 'Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste.' Indeed the very term 'Hindu society' was an oxymoron because there could be no 'society' in the absence of shared sympathies. 'In India people are treated with contempt, yet it does not sicken an Indian with disgust, rouse his sense of justice and fair play, and his humanity does not rise in protest at what is going on around him.'²² Being entrenched within a way of thinking that reduced human beings to their membership of particular castes, caste Hindus could not see the untouchables as human beings like them, let alone as fellow members of a shared community. Not surprisingly, they rarely took interest in, let alone campaigned against their degrading and inhuman status.

Ambedkar's analysis of how untouchability had been enforced for so long shaped his views on how it could be ended. For him, its eradication did not just mean ending a social practice; it involved nothing less than a social revolution, a radical restructuring of the very foundations of the Hindu society. It involved relentless struggle, an uncompromising, determined, organized, and occasionally violent movement by the untouchables with a view to acquiring political power, the key to all social progress, and using the institutions of the state to create an egalitarian and casteless society. As Ambedkar said to a meeting of the untouchables, 'You should realise what our objective is. It is not fighting for a few jobs here and there or for a few concessions. It is the

highest cause that we have cherished in our heart, that is to see that we are recognised as the governing community.'²³

The untouchables could not mount such a struggle unless they broke the hold of the dominant ideology, and realized that their lowly status was not their destiny or a result of their karma but the product of an externally imposed unjust and exploitative system. As Ambedkar observed on several occasions, slaves must be convinced 'that they need not be slaves',²⁴ that their slavery can be ended, and that it is within their power to do so, as the first necessary step towards their emancipation. For Ambedkar, it was equally important that the untouchables should develop a sense of self-respect, which alone can generate a 'divine discontent' with their current condition and a 'burning desire' to change it.²⁵ 'Self-respect is the most vital factor in life. Without this man is a mere cipher.' The untouchables must realize that they were fighting not so much to improve their material condition as to regain their honour and dignity and reclaim the title deeds of their humanity that had been taken away by their masters.²⁶

A sense of dignity and self-respect was acquired, Ambedkar argued, not just by claiming that one was a human being like others but rather through a struggle in which one asserted one's dignity, fought and made sacrifices for it, and tested and intensified one's commitment to it. The struggle developed a sense of agency and power, built one's strength and self-confidence, demonstrated to one's opponent that one will not be taken for granted or dismissed as inconsequential, and demanded and secured his respect and recognition. Every gain in the struggle reinforced one's self-respect and generated the energy to continue it.

For Ambedkar, it was important that the untouchables should also take a critical look at themselves, and ensure that they were worthy of respect in their own and others' eyes. Over the centuries they had developed 'evil habits and bad ways of living', ugly customs, passivity, a sense of helplessness, the tendency to pursue their narrow self-interest, hierarchical gradation among themselves, low ambition, and so on.²⁷ As a result, they were unable to not only unite for a common cause but also respect themselves and command the respect of others. They had developed deep and subtle forms of self-contempt and half-believed that they were worthy of nothing better. While fighting against the wider society and as a necessary precondition of it, they needed to fight against themselves and acquire the intellectual and moral qualities of free men.

Ambedkar thought that while concentrating on their own liberation, the untouchables should also aim higher. Like Marx, by whom he was deeply influenced, he thought that being the most oppressed group, they constituted a negative class, a concentrated expression of the evil of the prevailing system, and should become the vanguard of all the oppressed groups in Hindu society.²⁸ They should form alliances with them and set up a political party committed to the cause of social and political revolution. This is what his Independent Labour Party and later the Republican Party of India were in their own different ways meant to do. Once the oppressed groups were united, the state was theirs to take. As he put it in one of his optimistic moods: '[T]he scheduled castes and the backward classes form majority of the population of the country. There is no reason why they should not rule the country. All that is necessary is to organise for the purpose of capturing political power which is your own.'²⁹

Ambedkar argued that the untouchables could not change the Hindu social order without getting the caste Hindus to change their beliefs and practices. Like all privileged groups, caste Hindus would not do so unless they felt convinced that the untouchables were deeply serious and would not rest until the prevailing social order was radically restructured. For Ambedkar, a 'sense of crisis'³⁰ brought about changes in days that the slow reformist pressure could not achieve in decades. The 'great defect of the policy of least resistance and silent infiltration of rational ideas', on which in his view Gandhi and the liberals relied, 'lies in this that they do not produce a sense of crisis'. The untouchables were to create a sense of crisis by concentrating on strategically significant issues, mounting carefully planned struggles throughout the country, and refusing to be satisfied with concessions and compromises. While violence was to be scrupulously avoided, some might regrettably occur. Ambedkar thought that such a determined challenge to Hindu society was bound to trigger intense introspection in it and throw up a movement for change. That should in turn pave the way for a democratic polity in which all citizens including the untouchables would enjoy equal civil and political rights.

Although universal franchise was the *sine qua non* for the liberation of the untouchables, it was not enough. As a minority, they were powerless before the Hindu majority, which could use the 'weapon' of democracy to continue to oppress them. In a mature democracy, the

danger of this happening was mitigated by two factors. First, the majority was 'political', made up of shifting alliances and interest groups, and hence contingent and fluid. Second, it had at least some fellow feeling for the minorities and could be depended upon to pay some regard to their interests. These conditions did not obtain in India where the majority was 'communal', and hence permanent and entrenched, and did not have a fellow feeling for the minorities. It was a vested corporate interest group, a closed governing class, before which the minorities including the untouchables were totally helpless. Ambedkar wondered how to deal with such a situation.

Ambedkar conceded that the principle of majority rule lay at the heart of democracy and should be respected by anyone who valued the latter. Such ideas as consociational democracy and giving the minorities a veto in certain areas that had been tried out in other societies were either unfamiliar to or did not find favour with him. He thought that the best way to guard against majority domination was to devise an institutional mechanism under which the majority could not rule on its own and needed to share power with the minorities—that is, to make it what Ambedkar called a 'relative majority'. He relied on two devices, the policy of reservation and weighted representation in the legislature, both already in force in some form in colonial India.

The policy of reservation involved giving the untouchables a proportionate number of constitutionally guaranteed seats in the legislature and a measure of political power. Similar reservations in the administrative structure gave them some control over the formulation and implementation of government policy.³¹ Reservations in educational institutions, especially their higher echelons, ensured that they were able to acquire the qualifications necessary to rise to the highest positions in all areas of life.

Since the danger of minorities being systematically outvoted by the majority still remained, Ambedkar proposed weighted representation to reduce the gap between the numbers of majority and minority representatives. The majority was to be given fewer seats than its number warranted, and the minorities were to receive more seats than their proportion in the population, their share being in 'inverse proportion to their social, economic, and educational condition'.³² Ambedkar proposed that the Hindus who constituted 55 per cent of the population should have 40 per cent of the seats in the Central Assembly. By

contrast, Muslims, who were just over 28 per cent of the population, were to be allocated 32 per cent of the seats; the SCs, who were just over 14 per cent of the population, 20 per cent of the seats; and so on. Under this scheme, the majority community still remained a majority in the legislature, but it was no longer an 'absolute' majority able to get its way without the help of the minorities. The executive too was to be so constituted that it did not draw all its members from and feel accountable only to the majority. As to why the majority would accept such a reduced political representation and power, Ambedkar argued that it would otherwise face minority resistance and civil unrest. Although weighted representation did not violate the democratic principle of 'one person one vote', it violated the equally, perhaps even more, important principle of what Ambedkar called 'one vote one value'.³³ While conceding the point, he argued that weighted representation checked the abuse of majority power, gave the minorities an effective share in the government of the country, safeguarded their interests and rights, and in these and other ways served the basic objectives of democracy.

For Ambedkar, this was not, however, the end of the matter. While weighted representation protected and empowered the untouchables, it did not ensure that their representatives would reflect their views and promote their interests. Since they depended on the majority community to get elected, they needed to court its goodwill, which often entailed compromising the interests of the untouchables. The only way to guard against this was to free them from the electoral pressure of the majority. Ambedkar thought that a separate electorate for the untouchables, to which he was once opposed, was the best way to do so and made it one of the major planks of his political strategy. Such a provision already existed in relation to Muslims and others, and he could not see why it should not be extended to the untouchables as well.

Ambedkar insisted on a separate electorate for the untouchables at the Second Round Table Conference and secured in it the Communal Award of 1931. Under the Award, the SCs were to choose their own representatives, have a vote in the general constituency, and thus have two votes. Gandhi took the strongest objection to a separate electorate, some of his reasons being the same as those Ambedkar himself had given a year earlier when he too was opposed to it. In Gandhi's view, it was demanded by a very small minority and lacked general support among the untouchables. It assumed that caste Hindus could not be

trusted to represent the interests of the untouchables and insulted the efforts of many who were actively fighting for them. The separate electorate polarized the two communities, sharpened their differences, and hindered the development of common interests and mutual trust. It did little to improve the condition of the untouchables, the main reason for its demand. Once they became a separate electoral unit, caste Hindus would have no incentive or reason to end the practice of untouchability, and would continue to discriminate against and even ostracize them as before. Indeed they could be more brutal, especially in the exercise of their very considerable economic power, now that the restraining influence of even the minimum sense of community and guilt was replaced by resentment and hostility.

Gandhi argued that the advocates of the separate electorate were wrong to look at the issue only from the standpoint of the untouchables. Untouchability gravely damaged the caste Hindus as well, both psychologically and morally. They needed to be liberated from it just as much as the untouchables, giving both a shared moral interest in ending it. Rather than break away from the Hindu society, the untouchables should work with caste Hindus and mount a common struggle against a system that diminished the humanity of both. Gandhi also had strong political reasons for rejecting the separate electorate. He thought it would encourage the untouchables to define themselves as non- or even anti-Hindu. This would make them an easy target for conversion with its predictable social tensions and political consequences. It would also fuel their hostility to the Hindus and lead to alliances with other minorities that could systematically outvote the Hindus and pose a threat to their interests.

For these and related reasons, Gandhi thought he had no choice but to pit all his might against the Communal Award by embarking on an indefinite fast, something he could have avoided by showing a better understanding of and winning over Ambedker at the London conference. Ambedkar condemned the fast in the strongest terms, fought hard, and secured a compromise. The separate electorate for the untouchables was rejected, but the number of their representatives was considerably increased and they were to be elected in two stages. In the primary election, four untouchable candidates were to be elected by the untouchables themselves. Whoever among them secured a majority in the general election based on a joint electorate was the winner.³⁴

Although Ambedkar accepted the compromise, he continued to feel unhappy about it. It prevented an independent political movement among the untouchables based on a strong collective identity left the election of their representatives in the hands of the Hindu majority, and denied them the benefit of a second vote. To counter this, he demanded that the winning candidate must secure at least a certain percentage of untouchable votes in the general election but found no support in the Congress party.³⁵

Ambedkar refused to give up and made his last attempt to secure such a provision by getting Sardar Nagappa to introduce a Bill in the Constituent Assembly. Since the term 'separate electorate' aroused deep fears, Nagappa said that his Bill involved a qualified joint electorate. Voters were to be issued two ballot papers, a white one for the general and a coloured one for the SC voter. Candidates securing the minimum of 35 per cent of the SC votes were 'qualified' for election. Their general votes were then counted, and one who got the majority was declared elected. Nagappa's Bill met strong opposition and was dropped to Ambedkar's great disappointment. As he watched post-Independence India, he became bitterly disillusioned with the careerism and hunger for power of the SC representatives and their neglect of their communities.³⁶ It seems that he was no longer sure that a separate electorate would remedy the situation.³⁷ He could think of no other alternative than to urge the SCs to choose their representatives with great care, keep a keen eye on them, and ensure by means of organized pressure that they did not betray their communities.

Conversion

As we saw earlier, Ambedkar took the view that untouchability was bound up with the caste system, that the latter was integral to the Hindu society, and that the untouchables would always remain such within the Hindu social framework. However, he did not entirely give up on the Hindu society and hoped to transform it from within. He knew it had thrown up reformist movements in the past, and Gandhi's vigorous campaign against it from 1932 onwards gave him some hope. He supported temple entry satyāgrahas, joined the popular Ganapati festivities in Bombay, arranged inter-caste dinners and meetings, and so on. Increasingly he came to feel that all this was leading nowhere.

Gandhi's Harijan Sevak Sangh, which replaced the more radical Anti-untouchability League, neither involved the untouchables in their own emancipation nor confronted caste prejudices. Even that alarmed orthodox Hindus who intensified their resistance, spread malicious stories about Gandhi's private life, and even threatened his life. Ambedkar concluded that the Hindu society was beyond hope and that the untouchables would never achieve social equality with caste Hindus. As he remarked with considerable bitterness and exaggeration, 'There can be a better or a worse Hindu. But a good Hindu there cannot be.'³⁸

From around 1935 onwards, Ambedkar began to lose interest in temple entry satyāgrahas and fostering better inter-caste relations, and talked instead of converting to another religion. He put the point well in a speech in April 1942. 'I thought for long that we could rid the Hindu society of its evils and get the Depressed classes incorporated into it on terms of equality.... With that objective in mind we burned the *Manusmriti* and performed mass thread ceremonies. Experience has taught me better... we no longer want to be part of the Hindu society.'³⁹ Pride and self-respect too played a part as he felt that a religion that had for centuries treated his people so abominably did not deserve their allegiance. Although born a Hindu, he said he did not want to die as one.

For Ambedkar, it was not enough to reject Hinduism; conversion to another religion was crucial for two important reasons. The first of these had to do with the nature of Hinduism. Since it was not defined by a set of core beliefs whose rejection amounted to an exit from it but was acquired by birth, one could cease to be a Hindu only by explicitly embracing another religion. Second, Ambedkar took a largely functional view of religion. It was for him not so much a matter of personal belief as of social belonging and collective solidarity. To profess a religion was to belong to a particular community, to enjoy a sense of fellow feeling with its members, and to derive strength from their support. Conversion meant acquiring not just a new set of beliefs but a new community, a new source of solidarity. For Ambedkar, unless the untouchables aligned themselves with and derived collective strength from an established religion, they risked perpetuating their current social isolation and powerlessness.

Ambedkar asked which religion the untouchables and even perhaps other backward castes should convert to. He ruled out Christianity and Islam, the choice of many of them in the past, on several grounds.

Since these religions went for mass conversions, they had to accommodate the caste consciousness of their new converts and remained deeply infected by it. Although their caste system was fundamentally different from their Hindu counterpart in the sense that it did not involve religious sanction, excommunication, and pollution, and was moderated by a deeper sense of equality, it too was hierarchical and discouraged easy social contact. Ambedkar also thought that Christianity and Islam tended to 'denationalize' converts. Religions in India had a strong cultural, historical, and political content, and signified distinct nationalities. Since he saw Islam and Christianity as 'foreign' religions, he thought that to convert to them was to step out of not only the Hindu society but also the Indian nation, something the untouchables did not and should not wish to do.

Ambedkar's choice of religion was limited to Sikhism and Buddhism. He was sympathetic to the former in his early years but felt that it too was tainted by the caste system, though not to the same extent as Christianity and Islam, and carried a good deal of Hindu philosophical and cultural baggage. He preferred Buddhism, a 'truly egalitarian' religion, which had emerged in direct opposition to Hinduism without losing its Indian roots. It placed morality not God at its centre, concentrated on social ethics rather than divine worship and the other-worldly destiny of the human soul, involved no theological beliefs, and was not so much a religion as dhamma. Since Ambedkar took the view that the untouchables were originally Buddhists and had been made to suffer because of that, conversion to Buddhism also had the advantage of returning to their roots and settling historical scores with Brahmanic Hinduism.⁴⁰ He converted to it himself and encouraged thousands of his followers to do the same in Nagpur on 14 October 1956, nearly 20 years after he had first raised the subject. He called the conversion rebirth—an end to one form of life or mode of existence and the beginning of another. It is arguable whether the Buddha himself would have been sympathetic to the idea of encouraging mass conversions and that too at public meetings and without full knowledge of his doctrines.

Vision of India

Ambedkar's vision of independent India was articulated in terms of three interrelated ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, familiar since

the French Revolution, but to which he gave a somewhat different meaning and content. The three together constituted the basis of what he called 'social democracy'. Liberty stood for self-determination and the ability to lead a life of one's choice. It required a constitutionally guaranteed body of legal, political, and other rights, and depended on a well-structured state. Equality meant 'one man one value'. It involved not only political equality or equality of rights and political power but also social and economic equality. Social equality referred to equality of status and respect based on acknowledgement of the equal dignity and shared humanity of all human beings, and involved absence of all forms of discrimination, hierarchy, and exclusion in formal and informal relations. Economic equality meant equality of life chances and a broad equality of economic power. It required that no individual or group should be at the mercy of or exercise disproportionate power over others. Ambedkar called this 'socialism' or 'state socialism' and distinguished it from the welfare state, which provided a safety net to the poor but took little interest in the inequality of economic power and wealth.

The programme of the Independent Labour Party on which Ambedkar fought the elections of 1937 included a planned economy, nationalization of key industries including land and insurance, extensive state-supported industrialization, agricultural cooperatives, land mortgage banks, guaranteed workers' rights, land settlement, public works to relieve unemployment, free and compulsory primary education. Ambedkar wanted socialism to be enshrined in the Constitution so as to place it 'beyond the reach of a Parliamentary majority to suspend, amend or abrogate it'.⁴¹ He later changed his mind on both. He diluted the socialist programme when he set up the Republican Party of India, and decided against giving socialism a constitutional status in order to respect genuine differences of views on the subject and to allow the electorate to make its own choice.

For Ambedkar, fraternity meant fellow feeling, a sense of concern for and an active interest in the well-being of the members of one's society. It presupposed but went beyond equality and involved a sense of common belonging. People could be equal yet avoid living together, inter-dining, intermarriage, and other forms of social intercourse. For Ambedkar, mere citizenship, a relationship based on common

political allegiance, was not enough. It needed to be embedded in and complemented by kinship, fraternity, mutual concern, a shared nationhood, or what following John Stuart Mill he called a 'sentiment of nationality'. A sense of common belonging referred to 'a longing not to belong to any other group' but that of which one is a member, a 'corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those charged with it to feel that they are kith and kin'.⁴² Unlike nationalism which reified the nation and was aggressive and collectivist, the sentiment of nationality or nationhood meant no more than feeling at home with and caring for the well-being of people inhabiting a common territorial unit. It fostered social cohesion, mutual trust, a willingness to make sacrifices for others, above all a 'public conscience' that we discussed earlier, and gave depth and energy to citizenship.

For Ambedkar, fraternity underpinned liberty and equality, and realized them in areas lying beyond the reach of the law. Take something as basic as the rule of law, which is at the heart of liberty and equality. It implies that all are equally subject to the law, that none is above the law, and that it is enforced in a non-discriminatory manner. In the absence of fraternity, a law might satisfy these formal requirements but be so designed as to serve the interests of a particular group or oppress a minority. Even if it was just in its content, the judges and the police might subvert it in practice. Judges necessarily enjoyed some degree of discretion in all legal systems, and had to decide who to accept as witnesses, how much credence to give to their testimony, what counted as evidence, how to weigh it up, and so on. They might use their discretion to the detriment of those with whom they shared no fellow feeling or against whom they harboured prejudices. Similarly, if the police despised certain groups, they might distort evidence, ignore their complaints, record things that were never said, and harass them in ways too subtle to prove in a court of law.

Even if the law was fair in its content and enforced impartially, it would not necessarily guarantee equal treatment because several areas of human life lay beyond its reach and left the individual at the mercy of his fellow citizens. If a fellow passenger vacates her seat or mumbles abuses when a member of the despised group sits next to her or when a man refuses to rent his property to a member of the minority community, law offers the victim no protection. As Ambedkar put it:⁴³

It is striking that the worst injustice and persecution can be perpetrated within the limits of the law and in the name of the law, and a Hindu may well say that he will not employ an untouchable, that he will not sell him anything, that he will evict him from his land, that he will not allow him to take his cattle across his land, without offending the law in the slightest degree because the law is limited to the state, and in civil society oppression reigns rampant.

For Ambedkar then, liberty, equality, and fraternity were inseparable. Without equality, liberty was precarious and at the mercy of the dominant group. And, without liberty, equality led to uniformity and killed individuality, initiative, and creativity. Without fraternity or identification with other members of one's community, equality and liberty were 'no deeper than coats of paints'.⁴⁴ Although equal rights and liberties might be formally granted to despised groups, they would be subverted in subtle and crude ways and mean little in practice. Conversely, fraternity was impossible in the absence of liberty and equality, which removed artificial barriers between individuals and groups, facilitated easy interactions between them, gave equal dignity and status to all, and fostered a common sense of belonging.

It is hardly surprising that the Preamble of the Constitution of India, which bears Ambedkar's unmistakable fingerprints, enjoins the state not only to secure justice, liberty, and equality to its citizens and but also to 'promote among them all fraternity'. He was convinced that unless Indians rose above castes and creeds and discarded the deeply ingrained ideas of inequality and hierarchy, they could never become a 'united people'. He was also convinced that what mattered most to the people, especially the oppressed minorities, was that the government should be 'for' them, and it was to be 'of' or 'by' them largely because that was the best way to make it work 'for' them. Democratic procedures and institutions did matter but so too did the objectives pursued and the ultimate outcome.

Ambedkar argued that this was not going to be easy because of a deep tension at the very heart of the Indian polity. Its Constitution committed it to the great ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but these were largely absent in its daily life. As a result the state and society pulled in opposite directions. Ambedkar put the point well in his important speech in the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949:⁴⁵

On 26th January, which is our Republic Day, the country is going to enter a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality but in social and economic life we will have inequality.

In politics, we will be recognising the principle of 'one man one vote' and 'one vote one value'. In our social and economic life, we shall by reason of our social and economic structure continue to deny the principle of 'one man-one value'. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradiction? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment, or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.

For Ambedkar, the contradiction could only be resolved by the state dominating and systematically shaping society in the desired direction. Since the objectives of the state were alien to Indian society, they could only be realized if the state was led by a determined Westernized elite. If the state became a hostage to society as was the case for centuries in premodern India, or was led by men and women with no commitment to these objectives as in colonial India, Ambedkar saw no hope for the country.

Critical Appreciation

Ambedkar's thought was born in the crucible of personal experience and shows remarkable originality and insight. He was primarily concerned with analysing the causes, modes of legitimation, mechanisms of oppression, and ways of eradicating the practice of untouchability. He rightly located untouchability within the larger discussion of inequality and analysed the latter without losing sight of the specific form it had taken in the Hindu society. His analysis of the graded nature of Hindu inequality is profound, and explains why it was largely taken for granted for centuries and made organized opposition difficult. He skillfully traced its cultural, economic, and political roots and showed how they reinforced each other. Ambedkar was right to argue that the rigid compartmentalization of society brought about by the caste system and the resulting ethos of mutual indifference militated against any kind of fellow feeling and common life. This partly explains why in the vast Brahmanic literature on the subject, there was very little criticism

of the caste system. The Buddhists mounted the first critique. Even they were not as radical as they could have been, and their ideas were marginalized once the Brahmanic orthodoxy regained its domination.

So far as the eradication of untouchability was concerned, Ambedkar rightly stressed that the untouchables were not and should not see themselves as its passive victims waiting for others to liberate them. His great contribution lay in forging among them a sense of collective identity, which they had hitherto lacked. He traced their origins and history, highlighted the specificity of their experiences, offered them a vision of their radical social mission, reminded them of their earlier acts of resistance, and located their current struggle within an inspiring tradition. He mounted a powerful critique of the Dharmashāstras and gave the untouchables badly needed critical tools to attack the dominant religious ideology. In these and other ways, he sharpened and raised their self-consciousness and helped them become a self-determining collective subject. This extraordinary achievement has largely been responsible for a strong sense of Dalit identity reflected in the most welcome emergence of Dalit politics and a distinct body of Dalit literature and perspective on Indian history and Hindu religion and society.

Unlike many radicals, Ambedkar refused to romanticize the untouchables or nurture their sense of victimhood and self-pity, and urged them to put their own house in order. They needed to change their ways of thought and life, and equip themselves intellectually and morally for their emancipatory struggle. He stressed too that their struggle had to be conducted at several levels, including the ideological, the social, the political, and the economic, and that it was closely bound up with those of other backward castes and classes. He strove all his life to bring them together within a single political party committed to a radical economic programme.

Approaching democracy, equality, nationhood, state, and so on, from his unique perspective, Ambedkar was able to highlight and offer new insights into their neglected dimensions. More than any other Indian leader, he stressed the vital importance of social equality and showed that in its absence political equality remained ineffective. As he argued, social inequality humiliates and degrades its victims, undermines their pride, ambition, self-respect, and even breeds self-contempt. It also profoundly distorts their formal and informal relations with other groups and makes their lives a veritable nightmare. While political and

economic equality can facilitate social equality, they cannot by themselves create and sustain it. This was why Ambedkar was highly critical of liberals and Marxists who respectively put their faith in political and economic equality, took a reductionist view of social equality, and failed to appreciate its specificity and complexity.

The idea of fraternity is neglected in much of the modern, especially, liberal political theory, and Ambedkar was right to stress its importance. A victim of inequality and social rejection himself, he appreciated the role of fellow feeling in shaping our ideas of justice, influencing the content and enforcement of law, and inspiring the struggle against injustices. Although one can be moved by an abstract commitment to the ideals of equality and justice, one's pursuit of them gains in energy and tenacity when one is able to see the victims in their concreteness, identify with them, feel their pain and sorrow, share common emotional bonds with them, and is thus driven by what Ambedkar called fellow feeling or fraternity. He was right to stress the importance and power of moral emotions and a shared collective identity, and reject a narrowly intellectualist view of moral and political life. He was also right to insist that a sense of fraternity or kinship could not be created without social equality and fluidity that allowed inter-caste marriages and the consequent 'fusion of blood'.

Ambedkar's analysis of nationhood, with which he associated the idea of fraternity, is equally rich and suggestive.⁴⁶ A nation, for him, was not an abstraction, a transcendental entity hovering over and dominating its members but a community of men and women bound together by the ties of mutual concern and commitment. To serve the nation was nothing more and nothing less than to promote their well-being. This is why he felt that India's Independence struggle could not be conducted in isolation from the internal struggle against its own oppressive social order. As he observed on many occasions, the nation is not a primordial entity but a political project, not given by nature but a collective creation of the moral imagination of its members, and has claims on them only to the extent that it includes them fully in its self-understanding. Like Tagore and Gandhi, his view of nationhood had a humanist orientation and was remarkably free from the collectivism, narrowness, and aggressiveness that are generally associated with it.⁴⁷

While much in Ambedkar's social and political thought is valuable and needs to be built upon, it has its limitations. I shall briefly highlight

four of these. First, Ambedkar relied too heavily on intricate institutional mechanisms and devices to protect and promote the interests of the untouchables, and did not fully appreciate the importance of changing the moral culture of the wider society. To be sure, he did say that the Hindu mentality needed to change, and that their outlook, traditions, and social philosophy had to be transformed, but these were passing remarks and he did not explore how this was to be done and what it entailed. Not all his institutional mechanisms would make much difference to the plight of the untouchables if the Hindu majority remained implacably hostile to them. It might refuse to establish them in the first instance and suppress the likely resistance, or accept and subvert them in all too familiar ways. Even the separate electorate on which he pinned all his hopes would not have been of much help. There was no reason to believe that the untouchables would necessarily elect radical leaders and that, even if they did, the Hindu majority could not outvote, buy off, or co-opt them. A profound moral and cultural change was needed among the caste Hindus, and that could be best brought about by their leadership.

Gandhi saw this and rightly insisted that the Hindus must put their house in order. Untouchability was a Hindu practice, and it was their duty to 'repent', 'do penance', express regrets, and fight it. This might involve suffering and bloodshed, but it should be theirs not the untouchables'. The practice went against not only the great moral values of human dignity and equality but also many of their own great ideals, and they owed it to Hinduism and themselves to mobilize its reformist resources. The fight against untouchability was a struggle for the very soul of their religion, was moral and spiritual and not just political in its nature, and required the involvement of every one of them.

Gandhi led the campaign with great zeal and deployed a wide variety of strategies. When a textual exegesis did not help in his debates with the orthodox, he appealed to the 'spirit' of Hindu religion and, when that failed to work, to universal mortality and conscience. He also appealed to Hindu pride, guilt, shame, self-interest, and the good name of their religion, and generated enormous moral and political energy in support of his reformist cause. He set a personal example by adopting an untouchable girl, cleaning latrines, living and sharing meals with the untouchables, and attending marriages only when one of the parties belonged to them—all in themselves trivial but symbolically significant

and subversive of deeply ingrained taboos. Although his endorsement of some version of the caste system until the last few years of his life and his concern not to alienate the conservatives and weaken the unity of the independence struggle meant that his campaign was not as radical as it should have been, it nevertheless had a profoundly transformative effect on the Hindu society. Inspired and mobilized by him, thousands of Hindus carried his campaign to the remotest parts of the country, threw up powerful reformist movements, and shook the very foundations of the practice of untouchability. It is, of course, more than likely that he would not have given the subject high priority without Ambedkar's pressure. But equally, the latter would not have made much headway and would have been marginalized like other such leaders and movements in the past without the profound cultural change brought about by Gandhi. The two played complementary roles, one concentrating on caste Hindus and the other on the untouchables, one exerting moral and social and the other legal and political pressure on the Hindu orthodoxy.⁴⁸

Second, Ambedkar homogenized both the untouchables and the caste Hindus, and ignored their internal differences and common concerns. He was convinced that the untouchables had common interests and a common enemy, and that they should all unite behind the banner of 'one party, one leader, one programme'. He saw himself as their only true spokesman and his programme as the master key to their liberation. Although he was one of their best spokesmen and shoulders above their other leaders, he was not the only one and his views were not shared by all. The untouchables in different parts of India had different histories, different forms of interaction with caste Hindus, and beyond a certain point faced different problems. Their leaders disagreed about the causes and best ways of eradicating untouchability, including such issues as the separate electorate, the policy of reservation, socialism, the role of the state, and the nature of the Hindu society. Ambedkar tended to challenge their representative credentials and sometimes dismissed them as Congress stooges or victims of false consciousness. Apart from being unfair, such an approach tended to discourage a vigorous and healthy debate among the untouchables, suppress genuine differences of views, and to hinder the development of an open and self-critical culture.

Ambedkar showed the same homogenizing tendency in his discussion of caste Hindus. Almost all his proposals, such as the separate

electorate and weighted representation, were based on the assumption that caste Hindus were almost all hostile to the untouchables, that they formed a solid bloc, and that no justice could be expected from them. This is why he dismissed Nehru, the communists, and others as unreliable friends; dubbed them and almost all upper caste Hindus as 'Brahmins'; and once even said that no Hindu judge could be trusted to do justice to the untouchables, a widely resented remark for which he later apologized. Ambedkar's view did great injustice to large groups of Hindus. While some Hindus approved of untouchability, others did not. Among the latter some were for the caste system, some against it, yet others opposed its current form but not the allegedly egalitarian classical varnas. Furthermore, caste Hindus belonged to different castes, and had their own conflicts of interests and disputes about their relative hierarchical status. The same minutely graded inequality that hindered lower-caste unity also prevented that of the upper castes. Caste Hindus were thus neither a homogeneous and cohesive group nor an implacable enemy of the untouchables. This is not at all to say that Ambedkar was wrong to attack high-caste domination, but he was wrong to take a Manichean view of Hindu society and make it the sole basis of his emancipatory strategy.

Third, Ambedkar's thought had a strong statist and elitist bias. Like many modernists, he drew too neat a contrast between state and society, seeing the former as a rational progressive agency and the latter as reactionary and blighted, and relied on the coercive power of the state to transform society. He preferred a centralized state, had partiality for a unitary form of government, and opposed devolution of power to the villages, which he dismissed as a 'sink of localism' and a 'den of narrow mindedness'.⁴⁹ The state for him could only play a radical reformist role if it was led by a Westernized elite free from the limitations of the vast majority of their fellow citizens and acting in an authoritarian manner. True to the logic of this view, Ambedkar once suggested that the caste system and untouchability could be eradicated summarily if only India could throw up its equivalent of Mustafa Kamal Pasha or even Mussolini!⁵⁰ He even wanted the state to regulate and rationalize the Hindu religion, lay down its central principles, proscribe some of its beliefs, and monitor the training and conduct of its priesthood. He did not ask what competence the state had in religious matters, how this kind of theological engineering was possible in a liberal democratic society,

and whether it should be done in relation to other religious communities as well. Ambedkar was right to stress the state's emancipatory role but wrong not to see that force alone could not secure or sustain large-scale changes. Furthermore, to turn to the Westernized social and political elite as the sole agent of social transformation was not only to condemn the vast majority of Indians to the status of passive objects but also to alienate them from the state and weaken its legitimacy in their eyes.

Fourth, although Ambedkar was right to emphasize the importance of fraternity or collective fellow feeling, he gave very little thought to how to develop and nurture it. Castes obviously stood in the way, but their abolition did not guarantee it. Equal citizenship facilitated it, but it too was not enough. Ambedkar was silent on what else needed to be done to build common bonds of sympathy and mutual concern among citizens. What is worse, some of his own proposals seemed to militate against it. He relied on, among other things, the separate electorate to safeguard Dalit interests, but that could ghettoize them and hinder their normal interactions with the majority without which no common belonging is possible. One might argue that the separate electorate builds up their strength and confidence, empowers them, commands respect of majority, and fosters their sense of collective identity and solidarity. However, its dynamics can also work in the opposite direction, as it did in the case of Muslims in colonial India. It might heighten the sense of separateness, intensify the caste-based identity, and give the Dalit leadership a vested interest in perpetuating it. Even the conversion to Buddhism can have a similar effect. While giving the Dalits a strong sense of collective pride and identity, it can also distance them from the Hindu society and hinder common belonging. This is not at all to argue against conversion but rather to suggest that separation, whether political, social, or religious on which Ambedkar so heavily relied, sits uneasily with the goal of fraternity. Fraternity can be developed across religious, ethnic, and other divides as it has been in many societies provided one adopts a subtler and more nuanced strategy than what Ambedkar proposed.

Life

Ambedkar was far more than the totality of his thoughts and actions, and must also be judged by the quality of his guiding passions and

principles. He exemplified the great virtues of intellectual and moral integrity, courage, and a passion for equality. He had a remarkably open mind and changed his views on even the most important issues of the day without worrying about the criticisms it provoked. In his uncompromising commitment to the pursuit of equality, he stood up to the most powerful leaders of his time and braved their wrath. At their very first meeting on 14 August 1931, he told the Mahatma, 'Gandhiji, I have no homeland. How can I call this land my homeland and its religion my own, when we are treated worse than cats and dogs? No self-respecting Untouchable worth the name will be proud of this land.'⁵¹

He was equally blunt at the Second Round Table Conference. When in the aftermath of the Communal Award Gandhi embarked on an indefinite fast, Ambedkar feared that it would damage the untouchable cause. He condemned it in the strongest possible terms, calling it later 'a filthy and foul act', and braved the fierce opposition that his remarks provoked. Although his language was intemperate and he showed little understanding of Gandhi's reasons, he was right to stand up for his beliefs and create a crisis in Hindu society whose epistemological and political power he had long considered essential for radical change. When enormous pressure was put on him to compromise, he did not give in as others of lesser calibre would have done. He bargained, secured the maximum possible concessions, and got much of what he wanted though not his crucial demand for a separate electorate. In the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar wanted to incorporate reservations for the SCs and STs into the Constitution. Sardar Patel sent K.M. Munshi to persuade him out of the idea. Ambedkar not only rejected the overture but submitted his resignation as a member of the Drafting Committee and as law minister. Patel gave in, tore off the resignation letter, and asked him to continue. As Ambedkar once said, the words to which he remained true all his life: 'It is my solemn vow to die in the service and cause of all the downtrodden people among whom I was born, was brought up, and am living. I would not budge an inch from my righteous cause and care for the violent and disparaging criticism of my detractors.'⁵²

After Independence, Ambedkar felt strongly about the Hindu Code Bill, which he saw as a long overdue opportunity to reform the Hindu family law and undermine some aspects of the caste system. Although he was unfairly dismissive of the powerful electoral and political con-

straints on Nehru, he remained true to his conviction and chose to resign rather than hang on to power by agreeing to what he thought to be an unacceptable compromise.⁵³ When Gandhi died, Ambedkar did not issue a public statement of sorrow.⁵⁴ Since this was how he felt, he rightly resisted the temptation to make disingenuous populist gestures whatever the price he had to pay. His life, scarred as it was by great personal tragedies and bitter personal experiences and political struggles, had a rare authenticity evident as much at its end as during its tormented course.⁵⁵

Ambedkar's unshakable commitment to the cause of Dalits, the central organizing principle of his life and one of the main sources of his enormous energy and authenticity, generated its own blind spots. It bred self-righteousness, intellectual and moral arrogance, intolerance, and lack of self-criticism. Caste Hindus, especially the Brahmins, were his *bête noire*, and he had nothing good to say about most of their leaders. In his eyes, Gandhi was the chief villain. While he had a legitimate complaint against Gandhi, especially his 'epic fast' that denied him the separate electorate that he desperately wanted, he allowed it to become so obsessive that his attitude to him lacked balance and objectivity. Rather than appreciate that Gandhi fought against untouchability in his own way which, though different from his, was no less sincere; that Gandhi was closer to the Dalits in his dress, life style, views, and language than he could ever be; that they trusted Gandhi and gave him their loyalty to a much greater degree than to him; and that his 'epic fast' was supported by many of them and had its moral rationale, he continued to view him with bitterness and hostility that did not even die with Gandhi's death. Although he later condemned his assassination as 'a foul deed', he said at the time, 'My real enemy has gone, thank goodness the eclipse is over.'⁵⁶ In his letter to Sharda alias Laxmi Kabir, who later became his wife, he talked of Gandhi's antipathy to him and explained at length what he thought of the historical significance of Gandhi's assassination.⁵⁷

My own view is that great men are of great service to their country but they are also at certain times a great hindrance to the progress of their country. There is one instance in Roman history which comes to my mind on this occasion. When Caesar was done to death and the matter was reported to Cicero, Cicero said to the messenger 'Tell the Romans, your hour of liberty has come'. While one regrets the

assassination of Mr. Gandhi, one cannot help finding in his heart the echo of the sentiment expressed by Cicero on the assassination of Caesar. Mr. Gandhi had become a positive danger to this country. He had choked all the thoughts.... As the Bible says that sometimes good cometh out of evil, so also I think that good will come out of the death of Mr. Gandhi. It will release people from bondage to a superman, it will make them think for themselves, and it will compel them to stand on their own merits.

Ambedkar was wrong on several counts.⁵⁸ Far from showing him antipathy, Gandhi was well disposed to him in their personal relations, praised him in public, and pressed Nehru to appoint him chairman of the Constituent Assembly's Drafting Committee and a cabinet minister. Nehru seems to have thought of asking Sir Ivor Jennings to draft the Constitution, to which Gandhi and others took strong objection. Even if Gandhi had been as ill-disposed to him as Ambedkar imagined, he could have responded in generous terms as befitted a follower of the Buddha, 'the only person to whom I owe all my being' as he put it in the letter cited above. While great men do sometimes stifle initiative and individuality, comparing Gandhi to Caesar was wholly facetious. Although he was at times authoritarian and self-righteous, Gandhi did not discourage criticism and disagreement, publicity admitted his mistakes including a 'Himalayan blunder', opened up the Congress to a wide variety of views and groups, and took pride in recruiting and nurturing independent-minded leaders who frequently stood up to him. The country he led had enough self-confidence to marginalize him even during his lifetime and did not need to wait for his death to feel free. Although Ambedkar's hostile view of Gandhi, as of Nehru, Patel, and many others, was imbalanced and unfair, it was born not out of malice or petty jealousy but rather his passionate and single-minded concern for the Dalits, and was in its own way an expression of what gave meaning to his life.

NEHRU AND THE NATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF INDIA

As British rule consolidated itself and became an oppressive and pervasive presence from the middle decades of the nineteenth century onwards, reflective Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, began to ask why they had been conquered by a foreign power, especially one spear-headed by a trading company with no initial intention to subjugate the country and lacking the resources to do so. As the rather patchy debate proceeded, Hindu thinkers expanded its scope and gave it a new orientation. The British were not the only foreigners to conquer India. They were preceded by Muslims whose invasions and conquests had begun several centuries earlier. Although many Hindu thinkers distinguished between the two kinds of rule, some preferring one to the other, they saw them as part of a common historical pattern, and asked the more general and undifferentiated question why they had repeatedly fallen prey to foreign rule and what they could do to turn the corner.¹

Barring a few who blamed the foreigners' superior technology and guiles or India's innocence in worldly matters or departure from the norms of dharma, most Indians thought that their country had degenerated over the centuries and was in a depressing state. They disagreed about the 'nature', causes, and ways of reversing the decline, and over time built up a richly reflective, self-critical, and agonized tradition of discourse. In this chapter, I take a close and critical look at Nehru's diagnosis and the way in which he as India's first, most powerful, and longest-serving prime minister went about transforming it.

From the very beginning, Nehru's analysis of India's current state, like that of many others, was ambivalent. Sometimes he took an optimistic view of India's past and present, and argued that its current decline was temporary and not unique to it.² All societies rose and fell and often rose again, and India was no exception. The British and the Muslims had conquered India because they were militarily superior, not because they were a superior people or represented a superior civilization. According to Nehru, India had created a great civilization in the past that was second to none and had regularly thrown up periods of great creativity. Even when it later became static and weak and fell prey to foreign invaders, it retained enough vitality to expel or to assimilate and absorb them. Almost unique in the world, Nehru said that India had a great capacity to 'understand and adapt the new and harmonise it with the old' and to forge their 'synthesis'. This blend of 'amazing tenacity as well as some flexibility and capacity for adoption' represented its 'deep well of strength' and held the key to its long survival and future regeneration.³

For the most part, however, he took a different and rather dark view of India's history and current predicament. For a millennium between the seventh century BCE and the eighth century of it, India was a great civilization—rich, vigorous, full of zest for life, and distinguished by great achievements in a variety of fields such as philosophy, literature, art, science, medicine, and mathematics. It was economically prosperous and had extensive ties of trade with many parts of the world. But according to Nehru, from about the eighth century CE, it began to decline. There were no great works in philosophy and literature after Sankara and Bhavabhuti in the ninth century, no great scientists and inventors after the tenth, and the great period of foreign trade and migration for colonial settlement too came to an end around that time.⁴

Nehru had no clear explanation of India's decline for over a thousand years. He was convinced that although foreign invasions were partly responsible, they were not a decisive factor and they would not have succeeded in the first instance if India had not become weak. India had declined because it was seized by an inner weakness, a slow and creeping paralysis of will and creativity. Since the decline was the result of its internal weakness rather than foreign conquests, and since by its nature internal weakness worked its way slowly, there was no dramatic collapse of its civilization like that of Greece and Rome. Although Nehru

was vague about the nature and causes of India's inner weakness, he was convinced that it was closely connected with the mutually regulating individualist and collective impulses informing respectively its religious and social spheres. India's indigenous religions were all individualist, experimental, and non-dogmatic. Salvation was an individual matter, within the reach of all, and attained not by subscribing to prescribed dogmas but by self-purification brought about by whatever method suited the individual's temperament and level of spiritual development. The doctrine of karma ruled out vicarious atonement and divine or priestly mediation, and emphasized that each individual was unique, following his distinct spiritual journey through a cycle of births and the product of his own efforts in his past lives. Unlike its religions, the Indian social structure was group-centred. Each individual was a member of and embedded in one of the four varnas into which society was articulated, and was expected to follow its customs and practices. The functionally based and open varnas permitted social and economic mobility, and gave the individual a strong sense of social belonging without imprisoning him within it.

India thus had struck a fine balance between individual freedom and social order. The latter ensured that the former did not lead to anarchy; the spirit of individuality in turn ensured that the social structure did not become collectivist and oppressive. So long as neither tendency gained ascendancy, the Indian society remained intellectually vibrant and socially mobile. The delicate balance between the two was lost around the eighth century. For reasons Nehru nowhere explains, the social structure became rigid and static, and the open and loosely bounded varnas degenerated into exclusive, hierarchical, oppressive, obsessively puristic, and hereditary *jatis* or castes. The traditional dividing line between society and religion was obliterated with the result that the latter lost its independence, came to centre on caste, and got reduced to rigid dogmas and mindless rituals. With its decline, the spirit of individuality and freedom that it had nurtured also declined and the collectivist tendency of Indian civilization reigned unchecked. As Nehru put it:⁵

Life became all cut up into set frames where each man's job was fixed and permanent and he had little concern with others.... Thus particular types of activity became hereditary, and there was a tendency to avoid new type of work and activity and to confine oneself to the old groove,

to restrict initiative and the spirit of innovation.... So long as that structure afforded avenues for growth and expansion, it was progressive; when it reached the limits of expansion open to it, it became stationary, unprogressive, and later, inevitably regressive....

Because of this there was decline all along the line—intellectual, philosophical, political, in technique and methods of warfare, in knowledge of and contacts with the outside world and there was a growth of local sentiments and feudal and small-group feeling at the expense of the larger conception of India as a whole.

Unlike most Indian nationalist leaders, Nehru did not blame Muslim invasions and rule for India's decline, and his discussion of them was relatively detached and free of hostility. While discussing Mahmud of Ghazni, the archetypal hate figure in Hindu consciousness, Nehru did not stress his religion. Mahmud came to India to conquer and loot, would have done so irrespective of his religion, and was no different from other invaders. His army included Hindu officers, and he had even sent it to fight the Muslim rulers of Central Asia. Although the egalitarian Islam had some salutary effect on Hindu society, it had long passed its zenith by the time it came to India, no longer possessed a radical thrust, and brought with it no new methods of production and industrial organization either. Most Muslim rulers were unimaginative and reactionary, the only significant exception being Akbar who encouraged close contact between Hindus and Muslims in all areas of life and paved the way for brilliant syntheses in art, architecture, literature, music, philosophy, and even religion. However, the overall effect of this was 'more or less superficial and the social culture remained much the same as it used to be. In some respects, indeed, it became more rigid.'⁶ This was one of the reasons why after Akbar's death the 'air of change and mental adventure' that he had generated subsided, and India resumed her static and unchanging life.

While India resumed her slumber Europe did the opposite, argued Nehru. After a deep and millennial sleepiness of the kind that had seized India for a roughly similar period, European countries woke up in the seventeenth century and set about changing their economic, social, and political life with unprecedented energy and dynamism. Propelled by the search for markets for their goods and supported by their newly developed states, they spread out all over the world and found static India an easy prey. Unlike the Muslims, the British

represented an energetic and vibrant civilization distinguished by a new and progressive vision of human liberation. Although they caused grave economic damage, propped up feudal elements, and denied India full benefits of a modern civilization, they shook it up, awakened it from its deep slumber, and forced it to take note of the new light of reason. For Nehru, 'it was a good thing for India to come in contact with the scientific and industrial West'. Though the manner of the contact was most unfortunate, 'only a succession of violent shocks could shake us out of our torpor. From this point of view the Protestant, individualistic, empirically minded English were ideal, for they were more different from us than most other Europeans and could give us greater shocks.'⁷ In taking this view, which was also canvassed and encouraged by the colonial rulers, Nehru was no different from many other Indian nationalist leaders. Their writings, too, were suffused with soporific metaphors; stressed the need for a shock; accepted colonial rule both as a punishment for India's past karma and a welcome opportunity to strive for a better national rebirth; and preferred the British rule to the French, the Dutch, and the Portuguese, of all of which different parts of India had some experience.

Nehru's attitude to India's past then was highly critical. While he admired and felt proud of its classical past, he was deeply ashamed of what followed later. The reality of foreign rule pained him; its alleged necessity pained him even more. The feeling that India had for centuries been devoid of regenerative resources and needed foreigners to revitalize it is expressed in his *Discovery of India* and elsewhere with great poignancy. At times, he even seemed to think that its long decline reflected the grave intellectual and moral deficiencies of its people, and complained about the quality of the human material in India, especially the tremendous lack of initiative and capacity for concerted action in any other class save some sections of the Westernized middle classes.

Such a conclusion spawned an insidious and half-acknowledged sense of racial inferiority from which Nehru never managed to free himself. A trivial but poignant example illustrates this well. He was concerned that the British, especially the BBC, often misspelt and mispronounced his name, and found its length 'terrifying'. Rather than ignore it or laugh at the incompetence of the BBC, he felt demeaned. In despair, he wrote to Krishna Menon in March 1937, 'Unfortunately I cannot change my name but I propose to make a slight change in the

way it is written.’⁸ He decided to split it into Jawahar and Lal! Indian Independence did not exorcise or even abate that feeling. As its prime minister, he paid undue attention to and was guided by the advice and opinions of foreign commentators. Anxious that foreigners, especially the British, should think well of India, he went out of his way to give interviews, some inordinately long, to foreign visitors even when they had little influence or power in their countries. J.P. Narayan was guilty of only slight exaggeration when he accused him of valuing ‘foreigners’ chits’ far more than the considered opinions of even his ablest countrymen. In his letters to chief ministers, Nehru unduly worried about adverse foreign press comments on their governments’ policies, violations of civil liberties, or ill treatment of particular individuals. He desperately sought recognition from the West as the basis of his own and his country’s self-esteem, and that inevitably shaped his vision of India and choices of policies.

For Nehru then, India needed to embark on the path of comprehensive modernization if it was to avoid falling prey to foreigners’ aggressive designs. This involved seven basic goals—namely, national unity, parliamentary democracy, industrialization, socialism, cultivating scientific temper, secularism, and non-alignment. Collectively, they formed what he called the ‘national philosophy’ or ‘national ideology’ of India, and his task as he saw, it was to get the country whole-heartedly committed to them. We shall take each in turn.

National Unity

For Nehru, national unity, or what he sometimes called national integration, was the *sine qua non* of national independence and should be given the topmost priority. Over the centuries, India had repeatedly fallen prey to foreign invasion and rule because of such factors as a weak central government, lack of a nationwide structure of authority, narrow regional and local loyalties, and divisions among its people that were sometimes so deep that they did not mind inviting outside help to settle domestic scores. Unless India put this right, its history would continue to repeat itself. National unity for Nehru required three things—a centralized state standing above society and enjoying the undivided allegiance of its citizens, a shared sense of identity and common belonging among them, and territorial integrity.

As for the first, Nehru ensured that the kind of state he had in mind was established by the Constitution. The Indian state is centralized, enjoys undivided legal authority, and has the capacity to enforce its will throughout its territory. It is federally constituted but within a strong unitary framework that gives the central government the power to dismiss democratically elected state governments and create new states and change their boundaries without their consent. The state is armed with the powers to curtail citizens' basic rights and liberties, and even suspend the democratic institutions when they appear to it to threaten national unity and public order. It is autonomous, stands above society, and not subject to constant popular control. This was broadly how the colonial state was structured, and the new state was largely continuous with it. Nehru saw it as his task to protect, consolidate, and embed it in the consciousness and lives of its citizens while ensuring that it did not become as remote, overbearing, and authoritarian as its predecessor.

When confronted with demands that seemed to him to weaken the unity or divide the authority of the state, Nehru resisted them. He was unsympathetic to devolving greater powers to the states; when pressed, he made small concessions but did not alter the basic design of the state. For years, he was also hostile to the linguistic reorganization of the country. The state was a rational institution and should only be organized on the basis of administrative convenience and efficiency.⁹ To divide it on linguistic grounds was to plant a non-rational principle at its heart, to confuse its identity, and to pave the way for dangerous and narrow forms of ethnic and linguistic sub-nationalism. Even when he reluctantly bowed to popular pressure in the case of Andhra Pradesh, he continued to resist it elsewhere until he saw no alternative. It took him some time to appreciate that linguistic states and the consequent flowering of regional identities did not threaten the unity of the Indian state but deepened it.

As for fostering a strong feeling of identification with India and the sense of common belonging among its citizens, Nehru had no clear programme. He believed that the struggle for independence had done much of the groundwork and created a fairly strong sense of nationhood. He thought that industrialization would further bind the country in a network of economic interdependence and that planned development would ensure that no region felt excluded from the fruits of economic growth. He also thought that popularization of his 'national

philosophy' would unite the country around a shared collective purpose and forge common political and ideological bonds. He hoped that increased travel, improved means of communication, and elite circulation in universities, national academies and public enterprises would help generate a 'national outlook' initially among the elite and eventually among the masses. Like Gandhi, he was himself a symbol of national unity, and thought that he could transmute his countrymen's great love and affection for him into loyalty to India. Though Nehru had considerable success in uniting the country, he was deeply worried that the process of national integration remained slow, patchy, and superficial. Industrialization took decades to produce results and both united and divided the country. The national philosophy took time to gain acceptance, had its detractors, and was too rationalistic to touch deep nerves. And affection, for him, was necessarily fragile and not easy to institutionalize. Increasingly worried by regional conflicts and narrow-mindedness, he began to plead for the emotional integration of India, but neither gave it a concrete meaning nor explored how it was to be fostered.¹⁰

Surprising as it may seem in someone with an acute sense of history and a deep appreciation of the need to activate his countrymen's historical memories and subconscious mind, Nehru did not give adequate attention to culture and education, the two major vehicles of national integration. He valued and encouraged India's high culture, which provided a basis of unity among the educated elite but had little relevance to the masses. Unlike Gandhi who knew well and drew heavily on the images, symbols, and vocabulary of the popular or folk culture, Nehru lacked intimate familiarity with it, did not think much of it, and could not find a place for it in his style of politics. His language, images, metaphors, and sources of inspiration did not easily resonate with those of ordinary Indians, did not evoke their shared memories, and sometimes seemed to them to belong to an alien world.¹¹

Western states had relied heavily on education to unite their citizens by cultivating among them common competencies, values, self-understanding, and a language of public discourse. Nehru did not appreciate the nation-building role of education. He concentrated on higher education and ignored primary and secondary education, devoting vast resources to the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Management, national science laboratories, and research institutes but

starving primary and secondary schools. None of his ministers of education was a man of imagination and drive. During the colonial period, India had developed a wide assortment of schools—some private, others public; some secular, others run by religious communities; some that taught in English, others in vernaculars, and so on. After Independence, their numbers and variety increased, but Nehru paid little attention to the dangers this posed. There was little coordination between them, and no overarching framework of objectives to give them coherence. In many cases, their curriculum had only a limited relevance to Indian conditions and did not ground pupils in Indian history and culture. Text books varied greatly in their content and quality and were often suffused with religious, ethnic, sexist, linguistic, and other stereotypes and prejudices. Since pre-university education was a state subject, each Indian state followed its own policy, including about how importance to give to English and Hindi. Indeed English consolidated its hold as a language of power and prestige and continued to deepen the divide between the elite and the masses. As a result of all this, future citizens of India grew up without much awareness of their past, a shared body of values, a common national narrative, and linguistic competence, all essential for a common sense of belonging.

Territorial integrity raised questions about the country's territorial boundaries. By and large, Nehru took those of the colonial India as given. The boundary with Pakistan was fairly clear and raised no large questions. Kashmir did, but it was not about territorial integrity. The border with China was in dispute and Nehru's attitude to it was ambiguous. Sometimes he was prepared to negotiate the McMahon Line and thought it pointless to make an issue of a remote piece of land where not a blade of grass grew. At other times, he adopted a rigid approach partly under popular pressure and partly because of mixed Chinese signals. The confused negotiations to which these vacillations led and the Chinese impatience precipitated a war that deeply distressed him and left a legacy that still clouds the relations between the two countries.

For Nehru, all those who lived within the territorial extent of India as inherited at Independence formed part of it. It did not matter whether they wanted to stay on in India and how they came to be part of it in the first instance. He thought that while every step should be taken to give the fullest possible autonomy to its different regions, their secession was not an option. Several factors shaped this widely shared

attitude. The suspicion that such demands could be instigated by outside interests was one. And so was the deep fear that the new Indian state might not only eventually unravel but also fail to establish itself if every region thought that it could secede. The optimistic belief that no region in its right mind could possibly want to opt out of a tolerant and accommodating India, which gave them all the freedoms they wanted short of independence and with which they were assumed to share a common identity, also played a part. Like most of his countrymen, Nehru believed that as an heir to the Raj, the Indian state inherited its territorial identity and was not a voluntary association that its units may leave under certain conditions but an indissoluble union exercising sovereign power on all who fell within its boundary. This applied to the princely states as well which were all by a blend of persuasion, popular pressure, and coercion 'integrated' into the new state. When the Nizam of Hyderabad resisted in defiance of public opinion, the Indian army moved in. Secessionist movements continued to spring up in some parts of India, especially the north-east whose cultural and historical ties with the rest of the country were tenuous and who saw themselves as ethnically distinct from it. Nehru responded to them with a mixture of concessions and military force and, after a protracted struggle, managed to defeat or win over some of them. He respected their desire to maintain their cultural identity but was deeply apprehensive about granting them greater political autonomy lest it should lead with external encouragement to a demand for separation.

Parliamentary Democracy

Parliamentary democracy was the second 'national goal' for Nehru. Waxing eloquent over its virtues, he observed:¹²

I may say that it is a most satisfying and encouraging experience to see such an enormous electorate of more than 200 million people going through this primary responsibility of parliamentary democracy with such smooth efficiency. Ours is not only the biggest democracy in the world, but among the electorate almost every civilisation from tribal culture and the stone-age to the modern nuclear era is represented. This makes the achievement of such a big job well done, barring a few exceptions here and there, something to be proud of. For me this business of electioneering is a most exciting experience in mass democratic

education. We get an opportunity of explaining our ideals and objectives to the people; and the people in their own way educate us to appreciate their wants and complaints. All of us are richer by the experience.... This fact speaks well for the future of parliamentary democracy in our country. One gets the feel, and truly, of a whole people waking from the sleep of centuries, standing up and marching forward to a better and fuller life. It is this aspect of a whole nation in movement that I welcome above all things.

Until the last few years of his life, Nehru did not think much of the widely canvassed alternatives to parliamentary democracy, such as Gandhi's bottom-up democracy based on village republics and the communitarian, organic, and partyless democracy advocated by Vivekananda, Aurobindo, J.P. Narayan, and M.N. Roy. He thought that the latter fragmented the country, stood in the way of national unity and collective action, and deprived political life of a national focus. He also took the view that the largely illiterate, politically inexperienced, and conservative masses, just waking up from the 'sleep of centuries', could not be trusted to break with the past and allowed effective political power. For him, the Parliament was the place for rational deliberation and decision-making, people's role being largely limited to expressing their 'wants and complaints'. It brought together representatives of different regions and created a fairly cohesive political elite. It provided a centralized and nationally visible public space for debating and resolving big national issues, and gave the country's political life a visible centre of gravity. Within each state, the legislative assembly was to play such a regionally unifying and educational role.

Nehru knew that parliamentary democracy depended for its success on a strong and united opposition capable of forming an alternative government, which India had no hope of getting for some time, and explored ways of compensating for its absence. He regularly consulted and briefed opposition leaders, and involved them in the work of the Parliament and its major committees. His first cabinet had almost as many non-Congress and even anti-Congress as Congress members including Ambedkar and Shyama Prasad Mookerjee. He repeatedly urged his party to think of itself as a national organization, encouraged it to reach out to others, and welcomed vigorous internal debates and even dissent. On several occasions, he himself acted as the leader of opposition, publicly criticized his colleagues and even himself, and

acknowledged his mistakes.¹³ He encouraged the Press to play an oppositional role and rebuked chief ministers for penalizing critical journalists. Although none of these came anywhere near filling the role of a strong opposition party, they humanized the exercise of power, gave the opposition dignity and status, and helped build a broad consensus on major policies.

Industrialization

Industrialization was the third component of the national ideology. Although Nehru thought that India needed to encourage cottage and small-scale industries to ease the problem of poverty and unemployment, he saw them as a temporary expedient. Unlike Gandhi, he was convinced that India could not eliminate poverty and satisfy the legitimate aspirations of its people without large-scale industrialization. More importantly, the modern world was industrialized, and a country that failed to keep pace with it remained weak and vulnerable to foreign domination. As he put it:¹⁴

It can hardly be challenged that, in the context of the modern world no country can be politically and economically independent, even within the framework of international interdependence, unless it is highly industrialised and has developed its power resources to the utmost. Nor can it achieve or maintain high standards of living and liquidate poverty without the aid of modern technology in almost every sphere of life. An industrially backward country will continually upset the world's equilibrium and encourage the aggressive tendencies of more developed countries.

According to Nehru, India had remained scientifically and technologically backward and carried on with its traditional mode of production for centuries. That was why it had fallen an easy prey to industrially developed Britain. Now that it had learned the 'painful lessons' of history, it must speedily 'catch up' with the advanced Western nations.¹⁵

We are trying to catch up in India with the changes that came in the world hundred or hundred and fifty years ago That is, the industrial revolution.... And what does it mean? ... It means exploiting the mighty force that is hidden in nature.... As a result of that western nations became powerful, became rich, and the gap between them and the non-industrialised nations became a tremendous, ever-growing gap...

Now... another mighty revolution is constantly coming over the world and setting the stage for additional changes all the time.... So we have to go through not only one revolution but two. We have to cover the track of the 19th century and having reached the middle of the 20th, we have to function in this jet age, atomic energy age and the like.

For Nehru, industrialization had an inexorable momentum. A country could not industrialize itself in parts or in degrees or up to a point as Gandhi had proposed. And even if it could, the fact that other countries did not do so left it no alternative but to go all the way. The logic of industrialization was inherently comparative and global, and beyond the control of individual countries.

For Nehru, industry not agriculture was the lever of economic development. This was the economic orthodoxy of the time based on a misreading of the European experience, and he and his colleagues more or less uncritically accepted it. He was also in a hurry, and thought that industry-led growth transformed the economy far more quickly and effectively than that based on agriculture. He was also guided by cultural considerations. The degenerate, static, and tradition-bound Indian society desperately needed to be energized, its people taught to think in a rational and secular manner, and only a programme of large-scale industrialization could do that.

For Nehru, agriculture was a primitive and culturally inferior activity. It was tied to land, parasitic upon the forces of nature, and encouraged fatalistic and obscurantist ways of thought. It fragmented the country; confined one's vision to the narrow limits of one's village; was a breeding ground of ignorance, traditionalism, passivity, narrow-mindedness, and superstition; and lacked the power to haul the country out of its traditional grooves and propel it along the path of modernity. Nehru frequently argued that villages had been responsible for India's degeneration, and that changing the 'antiquated' ideas and habits of the peasantry and the rural India in general was one of the urgent tasks of independent India. His views were widely shared by the Westernized elite and urban Indians, and shaped their choice of the path of economic development. Since Gandhi had brought the peasantry into the public life and regarded it as the social bearer of his vision of India, those critical of that vision had an additional reason to marginalize it.

Socialism

For Nehru, socialism was both a 'scientific' method of social analysis and a normative doctrine describing a desirable society. Like Marx, by whom he was once deeply influenced, he found it difficult to integrate the two and ran into all kinds of difficulties. As a method of analysis, socialism was based on a belief in the primacy of the economic factor. The belief was not a mere 'conjecture' or a 'hypothesis' but a 'fact of history' as Marx had 'proved' with a wealth of historical detail.¹⁶ 'If there is one thing that history shows, it is this: that economic interests shape the political views of groups and classes. Neither reason nor moral considerations override those interests.'¹⁷ For Nehru, the 'socialist method' explained phenomena no other method could. The British had not colonized India in a fit of absent-mindedness or to 'civilize' its people, but to procure cheap raw material and a captive market for their goods. The recurrent religious conflicts in India too had economic causes and were in fact economic conflicts played out on the religious terrain. 'Every one of the communal demands put forward by any communal group is, in the final analysis, a demand for jobs.'¹⁸ Nehru was convinced that once independent India tackled the economic roots of religious conflicts, the latter would more or less disappear. 'Class conflicts there might well be, but not religious conflicts, except insofar as religion itself represented some vested interest.'

Increasingly, Nehru began to doubt the validity of the 'socialist method' of analysis. As one would expect in the Indian context, it was its failure to explain religion that worried him most. He had argued that almost all Muslim religious demands boiled down to demands for jobs. The jobs, however, only benefited a handful of the upper middle class, and yet the religious demands were vigorously supported by the Muslim masses who had nothing to gain and only their lives to lose in the likely riots. They might be victims of false consciousness or propaganda, but that was too condescending a view of them and could not in any case provide the whole explanation. More importantly, Nehru found it difficult to explain why economic demands were articulated in religious idioms rather than some other. Either this was just an accident, in which case he was offering no explanation at all, or the religious emotion was independent and powerful, in which case the belief in the primacy of the economic factor needed to be revised.

Nehru was also puzzled by the fact that although Gandhi preached austerity and made no or only limited appeal to economic interests, he had 'spellbound'¹⁹ and 'magnetized' the masses and inspired them to make great sacrifices. By contrast, the Indian communists, who concentrated on the economic interests of the masses and promised them nothing less than total mastery over society's resources, made only a limited impact.²⁰ Nehru thought that Gandhi's success was owed to the fact that unlike the communists, he activated and mobilized his countrymen's 'subconscious' historical memories, skilfully employed evocative images and symbols, and appealed to their cultural and religious sentiments. Gandhi also had a tremendous 'force of personality' and was able to charge them with his immense energy. This meant that human beings were moved by a host of factors, and the economic factors were neither the only one nor always the most important. Nehru looked for a more satisfactory account of mass behaviour but never managed to find one.

Socialism as a normative doctrine fared no better. For Nehru, it was not just an economic doctrine or a form of social organization but a 'new civilization' based on a radically transformed humanity. It was classless, democratic, based on human brotherhood, and encouraged cooperative and non-acquisitive impulses. Under socialism, production was organized on cooperative lines, it was aimed at the satisfaction of human needs rather than accumulation of profit, and the basic freedoms and rights of citizens were fully guaranteed. Unlike Marx and other radical socialists, Nehru did not place much emphasis on equality, reconstitution of the state, restoration of power to the people, and new forms of communal living. His socialism was basically aesthetic and liberal, stressing individual liberties and opportunities, some form of social justice, and internationalism.

Although Nehru's moral and emotional commitment to socialism was sincere, his view of what was practical and his political will to fight for it varied greatly. From about the mid-1920s until the mid-1930s, he championed socialism along the lines mentioned earlier. His views were well expressed in his long presidential address to the 1936 Congress session in Lucknow. He was a socialist not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific economic sense and wanted to build a new social order on co-operative, classless and democratic lines. Socialism was not just his personal preference but an 'objective necessity' built

into the historical process. Even at this stage, however, he was worried about two things. 'One is how to apply this approach to India. The other is how to speak of socialism in the language of India.... Merely to use words and phrases, which have meaning for us but which are not current coin among the masses of India, is often wasted effort.'²¹

Even Nehru's limited socialist aspirations frightened many of his colleagues and Indian capitalists. It triggered several resignations from the Congress Working Committee and threatened to isolate him. Although the crisis was eventually resolved, he learned important political and ideological lessons. He realized that he risked being condemned to political impotence without Congress support, and that he could not secure it beyond a certain point on a socialist programme. More importantly, he realized that since he was committed to basic human rights and liberties and rejected the use of violence to overthrow capitalism, his socialism was subject to and needed to be reconciled with the inescapable constraints of democracy. His countrywide campaign during the 1937 elections further reinforced his belief.

He now started not only to play down his socialist commitment but also to tone down its content. He argued that the Indian middle classes were 'too strong' and entrenched to be easily subdued, and that there was 'a tremendous lack of human material in any other class to take its place effectively or to run a planned society'.²² Attempts to achieve socialism were bound to provoke strong resistance; and a premature conflict on class lines would not only lead to bloodshed but also break up the country. Instead of talking about ending capitalism as he had hitherto done, he now talked of ending poverty and unemployment, improving the standards of living of the masses, and increasing national wealth. He even thought that since most Indians including the capitalists had come round to accepting the idea of planning, it was better to introduce socialism through it rather than stress it explicitly. It would seem that he had at last found a way of talking about socialism in the 'language of India'. As he wrote to K.T. Shah, secretary of the National Planning Committee, in 1939:²³

If we start with the dictum that only under socialism there can be planning we frighten people and irritate the ignorant. If, on the other hand, we think in terms of planning apart from socialism and thus inevitably arrive at some form of socialism, that is a logical process which will convert many who are weary of words and slogans.

After 1947, Nehru was in power and did not have to be so cautious. In the All India Congress Committee (AICC) resolution of November that year and especially in the report of its Economic Programme Committee chaired by him, he laid down a fairly detailed socialist programme. Banking and insurance were to be nationalized. Defence and public utility industries were to be part of the public sector. All industries having to do with food, clothing, and other consumer goods were to be reserved for the small-scale sector and managed on a cooperative basis, thereby further regulating the private sector. The state was to control investment, income, and dividends in the private sector; fix land ceilings; and organize the surplus land into village cooperatives. It was to set up a Planning Commission to design an overall economic strategy and to discourage creation of private monopolies and concentration of wealth.

The cumulative impact of the fears aroused by the two documents, the earlier 'soak the rich' budget, and the economic havoc caused by the Partition led to an economic crisis and the strike of capital. The Industrial Policy Resolution of 1948 represented a climb-down by the government. Though it talked about 'justice and equality of opportunity ... to all the people', it insisted that the 'emphasis should be on the expansion of production'. A 'mere distribution of existing wealth' would 'only mean the distribution of poverty'. The government was to eschew nationalization and extension of its range of industrial activities. As Nehru put it, he was determined 'not to injure the existing structure too much'. K.T. Shah, his economic adviser for many years, called the Resolution an 'utter disappointment'. D.R. Gadgil observed a year later that the 'old socialistic programme has... receded more and more into the background'.²⁴

The First Five Year Plan followed the 1948 Resolution and did not mark an advance towards socialism. It underplayed the importance of equitable distribution on the ground that it 'might only end up dislocating production and even jeopardising the prospects of an ordered growth'.²⁵ The 'bulk of the industry' was to be left to the private sector; only a small percentage of the available resources was allocated to the public sector; and the latter continued to be seen as a way of supplementing and facilitating the former.

Around 1955, Nehru's thought underwent a change. He was increasingly dissatisfied with the rate of economic growth and deeply worried

about unemployment and extensive poverty. He was also feeling politically more confident and was enthused by what he saw during his visit to China in October 1954. He now began to stress socialism once again, though in a vague and diluted form. He first talked about it at a meeting of the National Development Council in November that year. The Lok Sabha passed a resolution a month later stating that the government aimed at a socialistic pattern of society. A month later, the Avadi Congress reiterated the commitment and declared that a welfare state and a socialistic economy were to be the national goals.²⁶ The Imperial Bank of India was nationalized four months later, followed shortly by the nationalization of life insurance companies. Around that time, the National Development Council approved the critically important 'plan-frame' for the Second Five Year Plan developed by Mahalanobis, whose declared goal was to create a socialist society. It assigned an increasingly dominant role to the public sector and stressed the need both to exercise considerable vigilance against the growth of industrial houses and to broad-base industrial ownership by assisting small businesses. This was to be the overall strategy for the rest of the Nehru period.

From 1954 until his death in 1964, socialism to Nehru largely meant a planned mixed economy. He stressed planning because it represented a scientific and efficient way of utilizing the limited available resources and guaranteed an overall state control of the economy. He welcomed the private sector because it introduced a healthy dose of competition, prevented the public sector from becoming slow and sluggish, released entrepreneurial energy, and mobilized private wealth, and because an attempt to abolish it was bound to lead to a suicidal class war. The dominant role of the public sector was justified on both economic and political grounds. Only the state had the ability to generate the vast resources needed to set up huge industries in strategic areas. The public sector also gave the state a powerful economic presence in society, and protected it against the undue political influence and economic blackmail by the private sector.

It was striking that Nehru's socialism did not give high priority to equitable distribution or even to the satisfaction of the basic needs of the masses. No doubt, he constantly talked about these but largely as distant goals rather than urgent objectives, and they did not form the guiding principles of his three Five Year Plans. The latter gave low priority to public action aimed at eliminating endemic

undernourishment, banishing illiteracy, providing basic medical facilities, and ensuring decent housing, clean drinking water, and cheap food to the poor. Nehru did not appreciate that extensive public investment in such areas as education, health, and housing was not only a matter of justice but also a vital social and economic investment capable of yielding high long-term dividends.²⁷ In that sense, his conception of socialism was structurally flawed both morally and in its economic strategy, and could not create even a minimum form of welfare state.

Nehru came to socialism rather late in life, his early years in Britain and India showing no sign of it. Even when he was attracted to it, its appeal to him was based on distaste for competition rather than a passion for social justice. When faced with the inevitable opposition, he lacked the courage to stand up for it and opted for the facile view that equity was far less important than 'producing more wealth'²⁸ as 'otherwise you will have nothing to distribute'. In practice, Nehru's socialism did not amount to a new vision of society or a robust commitment to equality or even equity. Instead, it largely meant some degree of public ownership in certain limited areas funded largely by public borrowing and foreign aid rather than higher taxes and the profits of public sector industries. The limited degree of public ownership did little to alter the capitalist structure that dominated vast sectors of the economy. Thanks to Nehru's weak commitment to socialism, it did not take as deep roots in national consciousness as secularism and democracy, and become a significant ideological presence in Indian politics.

Scientific Temper

The fifth national goal consisted in the cultivation of what Nehru called 'scientific temper', 'culture', or 'approach to life'. For nearly a millennium, India had been other-worldly, inward-looking, a victim of superstitions and bizarre beliefs, and a prey to pedlars of religious dogmas. It needed to modernize its ways of thought and cultivate scientific thinking or temper. That involved checking and relying on facts, accepting nothing on blind trust or faith, revising beliefs in the light of new evidence, being precise in thought and expression, following the method of trial and error, and in general developing the 'hard discipline of the mind characteristic of the modern age'. Such an approach applied to personal beliefs as well as to social and political institutions and practices.

Although Nehru emphasized the importance of the scientific temper, he was anxious to avoid the positivist mistake of regarding the scientific as the only valid form of knowledge. That was why he talked of the scientific 'temper', implying that it was to be an important but not the only organizing principle of human life. He pointed to several areas where science was either inapplicable or inadequate.²⁹ It was incapable of answering questions about the meaning, purpose, and significance of life, and explaining such profound human emotions as love and beauty. Human beings needed faith in some distant objective, some vision of an ideal society, as otherwise they had no anchorage, and such ideals were incapable of scientific proof or demonstration. Science gave no guidance on how to use its results and needed to be tempered by spirituality, which gave us 'the right measure, the right perspective and the right direction'. Excessive preoccupation with hard facts had created a highly mechanical civilization, and 'ran the risk of producing a mechanised mind... thinking in grooves of thought, lacking a feel for the inner spiritual life, and stifling creative genius.' Indeed scientists themselves were beginning to reject the positivist view of their discipline. They postulated hypothetical entities they had never encountered and never will, thereby radically revising the traditional ideas of hard and observable facts. They also acknowledged that the knower necessarily mediated the process of knowledge and that the scientific knowledge could never be wholly impersonal and objective.

It might seem that in highlighting the limits of science, Nehru was characteristically taking away with one hand what he had given with the other, but that would be unfair. Rejecting the exaggerated claims of science did not mean rejecting science itself. As he put it, while realizing the 'limitations of reason and scientific method, we have still to hold on to them with all our strength, for without that firm basis and background we can have no grip on any kind of truth or reality'.³⁰ Science should remain supreme in those areas such as the study of the natural world with which it was ideally equipped to deal. It should be given full weight in those areas such as the study of society where it constituted an important element in the overall process of knowledge. And so far as trans-empirical matters such as the existence of God, the soul, or the other world were concerned, science exercised a negative check and helped decide what beliefs one may not hold.

Secularism

In the aftermath of the horrendous events leading to the Partition of the country, the question of the relation between the state and religion in independent India assumed enormous importance. Some wanted India to be a Hindu state, privileging Hindus over others and giving their interests greater weight. Some others wanted it to have a Hindu ethos, giving equal rights to all but greater public recognition to the Hindu religious and cultural tradition. Most, however, thought that India should be a secular state but disagreed about its meaning. For some, it meant equal respect for all religions; for some others, indifference to them; for yet others, varying degrees of hostility to them with a view over time to undermining their hold over the Indian mind.

Nehru strongly pleaded for a secular state, as did Gandhi, but their reasons were different. While Gandhi wanted to safeguard the integrity of religion which, being an entirely voluntary matter, had no room for coercion and could be easily corrupted by its association with the state, Nehru was primarily concerned to ensure the integrity and autonomy of the state and guard it against religious influences. The state, for him, was a secular institution, deriving its authority from its citizens and not some transcendental source, and concerned with their moral and material interests and not the welfare of their soul or their other-worldly well-being. It should treat its citizens equally, irrespective of what, if any, religion they belonged to, and it could do that only if it was not itself committed to a religion. It was to respect the moral integrity and conscience of its citizens, and that too required that it should be secular and not impose, institutionalize, endorse, or officially or unofficially support a particular religion. It should maintain a critical distance from all religions, neither respecting or disrespecting them nor caring whether they flourished or declined. The state, however, could not be indifferent to religious beliefs and practices when they had publicly relevant secular consequences, and had a right to intervene in the internal affairs of a religion on grounds of public order, hygiene, morality, and basic human rights and decency.

The state was most likely to remain secular if it was run by secular political parties. Nehru disapproved of religious parties and would have banned them if his legal advisers had not considered it unconstitutional. He did not associate himself with religious leaders, organizations, and functions, and strongly but unsuccessfully objected to Rajendra Prasad

inaugurating the restored Somnath Temple on the ground that it associated the state with religion and showed a bias towards one of them. Nehru was also anxious that political debate and discussion should be conducted in secular terms. Although he took a dim view of religiously based political arguments, such as those made by the orthodox in relation to untouchability, cow slaughter, and reform of the Hindu personal law, he realized that they could not be formally banned. He deployed various strategies such as marginalizing them by refusing to quote rival scriptures to support his case, ridiculing them as in the debate on the Hindu Code Bill, translating them in secular terms as in the case of a ban on cow slaughter, and making sure that he and his government always appealed to secular arguments. He also hoped that industrialization, education, compulsions of democratic politics, and the structuring of political discourse by the Indian Constitution would over time render the Indian public life more or less wholly secular.

Although the basic thrust of Nehru's secularism was correct and served the country well, it suffered from several limitations. First, it rested on a one-sided and narrow view of the public role of religion. Even as the contemporary history of India had revealed the darker side of religion, it had also shown its reformist and inspirational potential. Before Independence, Gandhi had used religion to inspire the masses to heroic deeds and to challenge unacceptable Hindu social practices. The project of social reform was incomplete at Independence, and much work needed to be done. The state could not do it on its own because it was new and inexperienced, its authority weak, its administrative reach shallow, and its coercive power not yet tempered by institutional discipline. Besides, the law had its obvious limits, which were further accentuated by the fact that the secular state could not easily interfere with practices claiming religious sanction. The independent Indian state needed all the help it could get to bring about the much-needed social and cultural transformation.

Despite all its obvious dangers, religion was such an ally. It could not be kept out of political life altogether as Nehru hoped because it greatly mattered to people, was too diffused in structure to exclude, and had got used to a public and even political role during the independence struggle. It made more political and cultural sense to activate its reformist resources, coax, pressure, and shame religious communities into making internal reforms; and in general to involve

them in the mammoth task of promoting social reform and ensuring religious harmony. Instead of avoiding all contact with them, Nehru could have set up advisory councils or consultative bodies made up of representatives of different religious communities at national and state levels and encouraged inter-faith networks at local levels. These bodies could have been charged with the task of discussing areas of conflict, diffusing tensions, campaigning against unacceptable practices with suitable government help and encouragement, and challenging reactionary readings of religion.

These bodies would also have served another important purpose. Although India's religious communities had known each other for centuries and even borrowed some of each other's beliefs and practices, their interactions were rather limited and marked by considerable mutual ignorance and even antipathy. The situation was made worse by the intense religious passions aroused during the two decades preceding the Partition of the country, and the horrendous violence that accompanied and followed it. It was therefore vital for the various communities, especially the Hindus and the Muslims, to get to know each other better, appreciate each other's hopes and anxieties in a new historical context, develop common interests, acquire habits of working together, and build cross-religious alliances and networks. Normally these things tend to happen in the ordinary course of social interaction in a vibrant and open society. However, since the civil society was relatively weak in India and had suffered intense politicization and distortion in recent years, the state needed to play a crucial facilitating role. That called for a closer informal relation between the state and religion, and a more nuanced secularism than Nehru allowed.

The second limitation of Nehru's secularism was closely linked with the first. Since he was anxious to avoid all contact with religion, he got caught up in many unnecessary controversies. Should Mahatma Gandhi be given a state funeral? Yes, because he was the father of the nation and a state funeral bonded the country. Should it be religious or secular? The former because Gandhi was a Hindu and millions wanted it that way; the latter because a secular state could not be a party to a religious event. Should the Buddha's 2,500th anniversary be celebrated? For all sorts of reasons having to do with India's relations with South-East Asia and the need to appropriate an important segment of the country's past, Nehru was rightly keen to make it an official event.

However, the question was raised whether this was a proper thing for a secular state to do and whether it encouraged similar demands for the great figures of other religions as well.

Again, should government ministers, the head of the state, and Indian ambassadors abroad visit religious places of worship, host or attend religious events, and participate in religious ceremonies? Yes, if they did so in their personal capacity; no, if in their official capacity. But how does one distinguish one from the other? And where does one draw the line? Even Nehru's own state funeral became a subject of controversy. Many secularists thought that chanting Vedic mantras was unsecular and should have been avoided. In short, Nehru's brand of secularism constantly provoked casuistical disputes and charges of inconsistency and even hypocrisy. What was worse, it created an acute feeling, especially within the Hindu majority, of being hemmed in by artificial constraints on expressions of their deepest beliefs and sentiments, and led to a great deal of resentment and bitterness against not only the dominant view of secularism but secularism itself.

Rather than take an impossibly austere view of secularism and provoke the marginalized religion to sulk menacingly outside the political realm, it would have been better to take a more relaxed view of it and allow normal and non-pernicious individual and collective expressions of religious sentiments as is the case in almost all Western countries. The British prime minister sees nothing wrong in attending the church, invoking Biblical stories and images in his speeches, and offering the nation's prayers in times of national crisis or for the dead in wars. And when he does so, his countrymen including non-Christians and non-believers are not in the least worried that such actions give religion undue importance, compromise the state's secularism, or discriminate against minorities. Despite the jealously guarded wall of separation in the US, the president, the state governor, and the city mayor attend the memorial services or installation ceremonies of important religious leaders, as happened respectively a few years ago in the case of Cardinal John O'Connor of New York and his successor Archbishop Edward Egan. Indeed the country does not think that its secularism is seriously compromised by the Congress and the Supreme Court beginning their meetings with a prayer, and by the dollar bills optimistically proclaiming trust in God.

The third limitation of Nehru's secularism had to do with the way in which he responded to the Hindu complaint of unequal treatment.

Nehru was rightly concerned about reassuring the religious minorities that their interests and identities were safe in independent India. His protective and occasionally indulgent attitude towards them, especially the Muslims, caused resentment among some sections of the Hindus who felt unequally treated. Rather than win them over by telling them why the majority needed to be generous and charitable, and showing patience towards their occasional outbursts of anger, he dismissed their resentment as mean-spirited and petty and lambasted them for being 'communal'. While he had no objection to the religious and cultural self-expressions of minorities, he was highly critical of those by the Hindus.

Although Hindus flourished, even dominated, in India under Nehru, they developed a deep sense of cultural marginalization. Some complained that in a country where they formed a huge majority and for those whose independence they had shed their blood, they were not free to express themselves and treated equally. Nehru's opposition to Rajendra Prasad's inauguration of the restored Somnath Temple, his enthusiastic celebration of the Buddha's 2,500th anniversary, generous government grants for the restoration of Sarnath and reinstallation of the relics of a Buddhist saint, and so on, reinforced the Hindu sense of neglect and even discrimination. A culturally insecure majority tends to become aggressive and intolerant, provoking insecurity and extremism of minority that, in turn, reinforce its own. This at least partly explains the apparently incomprehensible slogan, 'Say with pride that we are Hindus', which was murmured during Nehru's time and shouted stridently a few years after his death. Subjected to ridicule for their beliefs and practices for centuries, first by Muslims and later by Christian missionaries, and harbouring low self-esteem which their boastful claims about the superiority of their religion and civilization only served to highlight, Hindus were intensely sensitive to cultural slights, particularly after Independence. Nehru showed little awareness of this.

The Hindu discontent became more pronounced and widespread when Nehru embarked on a programme of social reform. Although it was needed in all religious communities, he concentrated on the Hindus in the hope that this would set an example to others and convince them of his government's impartiality. There was no difficulty about abolishing the practice of untouchability because most Hindus agreed on that. Other social practices were not so simple, such as the grossly unequal

rights of women in matters relating to marriage, property, and succession. When Nehru decided to legislate against them, he ran into fierce opposition from not only the conservatives including the President of India but also the Left including Kripalani. Some, such as Rajendra Prasad, argued that the practices had a religious basis and were outside the purview of the secular state. Others such as Kripalani argued that since Nehru did not introduce such reforms in other communities or even use the occasion to encourage a serious debate in their ranks, he was guilty of the very communalism that he castigated in his opponents.³¹

Some of these critics were strongly in favour of Nehru's reforms but thought that his government was being selectively secular—claiming rights and exercising powers with respect to Hindus that it did not dare in relation to others. The government seemed to them to act as a Hindu government in relation to the Hindus, taking liberties no non-Hindu government would have taken, but as a secular government in relation to non-Hindus, scrupulously respecting their religious boundaries. This exposed it to the charge of inconsistency, even insincerity, in its commitment to secularism. The asymmetry was part of the Indian Constitution itself, which took a protective, even protectionist, view of minorities and exempted their institutions and practices but not those of the majority from state interference. It took this view because it assumed, among other things, that the state would generally be run or at least dominated by the Hindus who had therefore no reason to fear it, whereas the minorities had. If the architects of the Constitution had imagined a non-Hindu government in office, they would have placed some limits on the state's power to regulate majority practices.³²

Some of the inconsistencies and difficulties of Nehru's theory and practice of secularism sprang from the inescapable constraints of the Indian political reality, especially the need to reassure and protect religious minorities against their real and imaginary fears of Hindu domination. Some others sprang from Nehru's tendency to take the Hindus for granted and adopt an unjustifiably high-minded and insensitive attitude to their aspirations and anxieties. Yet others were inherent in his somewhat narrow and austere conception of secularism. Of the three, the first represented historical constraints about which Nehru could do little. For the other two, he remained open to criticism. The task he left his successors was how to develop a more even-handed and religiously generous form of secularism while remaining true to its core values.

Non-alignment

International relations were Nehru's favourite area of interest. During the independence struggle, he constantly drew his countrymen's attention to their importance and was the principal architect of many an important Congress resolution on international subjects. During his years as prime minister, he remained his own foreign minister.

Since India was a new state without a tradition of foreign policy except what had been developed by the colonial government to serve its geopolitical interests, Nehru had to fashion it himself. His conduct of foreign affairs was initially guided by little more than vague principles and aspirations. It took him some years to develop what could be called a foreign 'policy'—that is, a reasonably long-term, coherent, and well-thought-out view of India's vital interests and place in the world. In some areas such as India's relations with overseas Indians, he never managed to develop a clear policy.

In Nehru's view, India had several advantages denied to most other states. Though a new state, it was an old civilization, with a 'certain measure of wisdom and maturity' that came with age and experience. It also had a distinct outlook on the world derived from its philosophical heritage, especially the Advaita. Gandhi had enriched that heritage and developed a unique way of resolving conflicts that had considerable international relevance. Since India had been influenced by the West for over two centuries, it represented a unique synthesis of the East and the West and was ideally placed to mediate between them. The fact that it was outside the main arena of international conflicts meant that it was able to bring to them a certain degree of detachment and impartiality. For these and other reasons, Nehru thought that India had a creative role to play in the world and should aim not only to pursue its own interests but also influence the prevailing ways of thinking about and conducting international affairs.

Nehru was deeply concerned about the increasing polarization of the world into two rigid power blocks. Capitalism and communism were in his view outdated ideologies, a legacy of the nineteenth century. Capitalism could not survive without extensive state intervention in the economy and meeting the popular demands for equality and justice. For its part, communism could not last long unless it satisfied the 'irrepressible' human desire for freedom and individuality. Each therefore had to

change, was in fact changing, and the two were increasingly converging on a shared body of ideals. Nehru was convinced that 'enlightened capitalism' could coexist with 'liberalized communism' and that the two systems, being different ways of realizing common ideals, could compete in a spirit of friendly rivalry. Their peaceful coexistence was the only 'rational' way to organize international relations.

Nehru thought that India had a considerable historical experience in this area and might offer one possible model. Different religious, ethnic, racial, and other groups had for centuries co-existed within its boundary in a spirit of harmony, and learned to negotiate their relations without an overreaching state determining and imposing the terms of their engagement. India's example showed that it was possible to create order without a state and that world peace did not require a world state but only a willingness to work together within an agreed institutional framework. Nehru also thought that India could make a genuine contribution towards developing a philosophy of and creating the conditions of peaceful coexistence. Indian civilization was based on the deeply held belief that different men and societies perceived reality differently, that truth was not a monopoly of any of them, that a dialogue between them was both possible and necessary, and that they shared many things in common to which their exaggerated sense of difference temporarily blinded them. Over the centuries and especially under Gandhi's leadership, India had acquired special skills in uncovering the common ground and opening up a dialogue between apparently opposite points of view. Nehru thought that India could play a vital mediating role in a deeply divided world.

In Nehru's view, the major powers for their own different reasons had failed to grasp the importance of nationalism. Since the West held German nationalism responsible for the two World Wars, especially the second, it regarded nationalism as a dangerous and reactionary phenomenon, forgetting the constructive state-building role it had played in its own history. For the Soviet Union, nationalism was a bourgeois device to conceal the reality of class conflict, a distraction from the far more important class struggle at the global level. For Nehru, the experience of India and other newly independent countries pointed in a different direction. Nationalism had given them the ideology, the energy, and the unity required to challenge the colonial rule. After Independence, it helped them to define their identity, piece together

their ruptured history, unite their people, and find for them a valued place in the world of nations. The West needed to realize that not communism but nationalism was the most powerful force in the world, and that it stood a good chance of retaining the friendship of the new states and arresting the spread of communism by aligning itself with their nationalist aspirations. For its part, the Soviet Union had to realize that it could not for long suppress the deepest aspirations of its nationalities and client states, and that communism had no chance of success in the new states unless it indigenized itself and came to terms with nationalism. Nehru was convinced that once the aspirations of the new countries were respected and allowed to run their course, their nationalism would lose its narrowness and become more open and relaxed.

Nehru thought that as the first country to be free from colonial rule, India's experiences and insights had particular relevance for others in a similar position. He supported their struggles for Independence, spoke for them in international forums, emphasized their common interests, and explored ways of bringing them together. In many ways, he helped create the Third World and gave it a distinct identity and role. For him, it was a world of new and proud states, sharing in common their experiences of oppression and struggle, and striving, each in its own way, to attain the crucial goals of national integration, economic development, and freedom from crude and subtle external interference. The Third World included not only the European ex-colonies but also countries like Yugoslavia that sought liberation from Soviet oppression and those like China that, though not colonies, had suffered from Western domination.

For Nehru, the Third World was not so much an economic category that it later became but a political and cultural category, not a negative and residual entity consisting of states that fell outside the ambit of the two superpowers but a positive and self-defining entity consisting of states with a genuine desire and determination to remain independent of both blocs. That was why he felt that a newly independent state that aligned itself to a power bloc and mortgaged its economic and political independence betrayed both itself and other new states. It betrayed its struggle for independence, wasted the sacrifices made by countless men and women in the cause of its freedom, and lacked self-respect and pride. It also broke ranks with other Third World states, weakened their solidarity, encouraged manipulation and intervention by major powers,

and made it extremely difficult both for it and them to fight for their rights in world forums. The Third World represented the exploited and oppressed states of the world, and its strength lay in organization and unity. In taking this view, Nehru linked up their concerns with those of the oppressed classes in the West and involved Western socialists in their struggle.

Nehru insisted that India should remain outside the two power blocs and follow an independent foreign policy. Such a policy affirmed and safeguarded its political independence. It was the only common ground on which Indians of different ideological persuasions could unite. And India could mediate between the superpowers, mobilize world opinion on important issues, loosen up and reconstitute the rigid international system, and speak for the Third World only if it did not align itself to one of the power blocs. In much of the literature on the subject, Nehru's foreign policy is misleadingly described as non-aligned, neutral, or independent. Non-alignment was just one aspect of it and did not exhaust its full range and ambition. Besides it was not the goal of foreign policy but only a precondition of acting independently. Nehru's foreign policy could not be adequately described as neutral either. India neither was nor wished to be neutral on any of the major issues. It freely expressed, even pressed its views; took sides; and found itself allied to different groups on different occasions. Even the term 'independent' does not quite capture the central features of India's foreign policy. It only highlights the fact that the latter was formulated without external pressure and the institutional constraints of membership of a political group or military bloc, and says little about its wider global objectives.

In his view of the world, Nehru stressed India's Asian identity and assigned Asia an important international role.³³ For him Asia was the home of several ancient civilizations, the cradle of all great religions including Christianity, and the largest continent in terms of area and population. It had a distinct perspective on the world based on its great cultural traditions and colonial experience, and deserved to be heard and better represented in international institutions. Nehru did not fully appreciate that Asia was not a coherent unit and that great efforts were needed at all levels to develop a pan-Asian identity. Unlike European countries, Asian countries had only limited historical contacts and shared neither a common religion nor common cultural origins. To be sure, Hindu and Buddhist ideas had travelled to different parts of Asia,

but their spread was uneven, impact limited, and legacy overlaid by Islamic and Christian influences.

The idea of a shared Asian civilization, whose important sources Nehru and others traced to India, meant much to Indians but little to other Asian countries. Tagore was heard with some degree of incomprehension in Japan when he repeatedly invoked it in his speeches. This was also true of China. It once had trade and cultural ties with India but not in recent decades. Under British rule, Indian soldiers had fought the Chinese and engaged in theft and pillage during the Boxer Rebellion. The Chinese held India in low esteem because of its inability to preserve its national integrity, one of the important tests by which they have traditionally judged a country. Though Nehru's celebration of the Buddha's 2,500th anniversary made some impact on some South East Asian countries, it had none on China whose government was hostile to religion, and thought that Nehru was being hypocritical in celebrating a figure whose followers had been persecuted and driven out of the country by Hindu rulers. For Nehru, China and India were old friends who had sadly lost contact; for China, they were distant acquaintances whose relations were scarred by pockets of some unhappy Chinese memories.

To be sure, Nehru's invocation of the Asian identity did have advantages. It revived several ancient memories and breathed life into the small and long-neglected seeds from which a common civilizational tree could grow. It highlighted the inescapable compulsions of shared geography, and the need to forge direct bonds between countries hitherto related by European mediations. It also, however, had its disadvantages. Other Asian countries resented India's claim to speak in their name on international forums. Since the Asian identity, as Nehru defined it, had a cultural core and made India its historical home, it was seen by some as a vehicle of India's hegemonic ambitions. It also lulled Nehru into thinking that India's neighbours would settle their territorial and other disputes with it as 'fellow Asians'. The painful realization in 1962 that the Asians were no better than the Europeans in that regard almost killed him.

Thanks to Nehru's foreign policy, India played a valuable international role. It contributed towards a better understanding between the two superpowers and between the metropolitan countries and their ex-colonies. It brought the countries of the Third World together, helped

forge common bonds between them, and made them a moderately effective world force. India also linked up with progressive elements in the West and helped create a powerful world opinion in favour of peaceful co-existence and the economic development and territorial integrity of the new states. So far as India itself was concerned, Nehru's international role had mixed consequences. It broadened and deepened its political consciousness and gave its nationalism an international orientation. It strengthened India's self-confidence and self-esteem, and gave it an easy access to an influential constituency and high political visibility in the West. It brought India into various international commissions and organizations, offered it valuable insights into the workings of the international system, and helped it to build up useful contacts. India's international prominence also had its disadvantages. India developed an exaggerated sense of its own importance and mistook visibility for power. It euphoriantly saw itself as a political darling of the world, and remained blind to the way the cynical world used it to serve its purpose and the need to build up its own inner strength. It made Indian self-esteem heavily dependent on international good opinion, perpetuated its colonial sense of inferiority, and rendered it vulnerable to international manipulation.³⁴

Since Nehru's India saw itself as a global actor, it neglected the vital task of consolidating its relations with its neighbours. This is not to deny that Nehru genuinely desired good relations with them, and sometimes went out of his way and for some of his colleagues even acted against India's national interest to win them over. In spite of strong internal opposition and the warning of his senior colleagues that India needed Tibet as a buffer, and that China might destroy its religious heritage and cast a covetous eye on some parts of North-East India, he recognized the Chinese claim over Tibet. He refused to interfere in the internal affairs of Nepal even when invited to do so. He not only accepted the legitimacy of Pakistan whose creation he had passionately opposed for years but even offered to unite the two countries in a confederation. He could have gained control of the whole of Kashmir but opted instead for a plebiscite. He helped China play a crucial role at Bandung, declined to take its permanent seat on the Security Council, and showed great generosity in dealing with the problem of Indian settlers in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. While many of these actions were commendable and did not always receive the response or even the recognition they deserved, the fact

remained that India's policy towards its neighbours lacked consistency and coherence. It was a strange mixture of accommodation and intransigence, equality and condescension. Thanks to his concern to play a leading role on the world stage, an aspiration that China never shared, Nehru saw India's smaller neighbours in a global rather than a regional context and did not give them the degree of attention they merited and expected. Since he was convinced of his good intentions towards them, he was inadequately sensitive to their suspicions and fears of India. And since he saw them as geographical and cultural offshoots of India, he unintentionally gave them the impression of being patronizing and unwilling to recognize their independent cultural identity.

Justification of National Philosophy

While many Indians were persuaded by Nehru's national philosophy outlined earlier, large groups were unsympathetic even hostile to different parts of it. Nehru knew he needed to convince them that it was not just his personal preference or an ideological fad but both morally right and in the country's best interest. The need to do so was particularly great because Gandhi, a far more influential figure than him, had canvassed a different vision of India involving different goals or radically different interpretations of those the two shared in common. Nehru's justification of his national philosophy was somewhat muddled and articulated in three different idioms.

First, he argued that it was grounded in Indian civilization and an integral part of the country's history and culture.³⁵ 'Our philosophy and ideology are not some private fads or creations of mine. They belong to the ethos of our nation and people.'³⁶ And again, '[o]ur ideology springs from the very sources of our history and civilisation.' Apart from vague references to the 'central lessons' of Indian history and the character of the Indian people and civilization, Nehru gave no evidence to support his view and it is doubtful that he could have.

For Nehru, secularism meant state indifference to religion. Such a notion is alien to all the major Indian traditions. For the Hindu majority, religion is a total way of life regulating not just the personal but also the political life. In a traditional Hindu kingdom, the polity and the social order were inseparable and the king's *rajdharma* consisted in, among other things, preserving and enforcing the caste-based social structure.

Like secularism, such other national goals as parliamentary democracy, socialism, industrialization, and non-alignment too had none or only a limited basis in Indian civilization. Neither the modern concept of democracy nor its representative and individualistically structured parliamentary articulation has a parallel in Indian thought and practice. The Hindu society never set much store by equality and, although it valued justice, it defined it in non-egalitarian terms. Indeed since the individual's birth and natural endowments were believed to be determined by his karma in the previous life and hence fully deserved, the modern merit or even need-based notion of justice has no analogue in much of Hindu thought. In the Hindu theory of *purusharthas*, the acquisition of *artha* is hedged in by several constraints and cannot form the basis of the modern industrial society as Bankim Chatterjee had skilfully shown in his *Sāmya*.

Second, Nehru argued that his national philosophy had been agreed upon by the Indian people, and enjoyed popular legitimacy and support. His claim was only partially valid. Some of the national goals were no doubt embodied in the Constitution of India, and some others had formed part of the Congress programme endorsed by the electorate at successive elections fought under Nehru's leadership. However, the Constituent Assembly was elected on a very limited franchise, with barely a third of the adults enjoying the right to vote. More than half the electorate never voted for the Congress in any of the three elections during Nehru's premiership. The elections were fought on a number of issues, the national ideology being only one of them. Even the Congress itself was deeply divided, and a sizeable section of it did not subscribe either to some of Nehru's goals or to his interpretations of them.

Nehru's third justification of his national philosophy, upon which he generally relied, was articulated in a historicist language and appealed to the interests and fears of his countrymen. The national ideology, he argued, was 'vital to India's survival', 'imperative to our existence and progress', in 'our national interest', and grounded in the 'logic of history'.³⁷ India needed to modernize itself because that was the only way to solve its economic, political, and other problems and regenerate its intellectual and moral life. Modernization had a comparative logic in the sense that its pace was dictated by others. It was a race, and only the countries that adopted the latest ideas and technologies and kept

abreast of the rest of the world had a hope of success. As India's history showed, it had a tendency to become complacent, to move a little forward, and then stop or move backward, which is why foreigners had taken advantage of it. It must become a contemporary of the rest of the world in its ways of thought and life. Progress consisted in adopting the modern Western civilization; the alternative to it was decay and eventual extinction.

Nehru went further and contended that modern civilization was in harmony with some of the deepest impulses of human nature.³⁸ As history showed, man was a progressive being with an irrepressible desire for freedom. Obviously the progress was not linear, continuous and uniform, and was often marked by setbacks. However, it was striking that the setbacks were never permanent. 'History, as a famous writer has described it, is a record of the martyrdom of man. Perhaps so. It is also a record of repeated resurrections after every crucifixion.'³⁹ Modern civilization removed natural and social obstacles standing in the way of human unity, overcame material scarcity, and developed new ways of protecting and nurturing freedom and individuality. Industrialization, its basis, was not merely a technological but a moral phenomenon representing a vital step in man's 'long march' towards freedom. For Nehru, India must embrace modernity because it was both a historical necessity and represented a higher civilization. Within his historicist world view, necessity and desirability, history and ethics, tended to coincide. Modernization involved not just industrialization but all the seven 'national goals' discussed earlier.

Nehru had to reassure his countrymen that modernization did not amount either to copying the West or rejecting their past, the two closely related sore points for most of them. Like other Indian leaders, he invoked the overworked ideas of *yugadharma* and *samanvaya*. As Indians knew, the wheel of *kāla* was relentless; one yuga yielded place to another; each yuga had its own unique problems and needs; and a wise society discovered and followed the dharma of the yuga in which it lived. Modernization was the supreme dharma of the modern age. In modernizing themselves, Indians were not 'blindly' copying the West but only appropriating whatever was valuable in it. They had their own 'great past' and their own distinctive 'national genius', and there was no reason why they should not integrate the two. Indeed, such a 'spirit of *samanvaya*' was one of their great national characteristics, envied by

foreigners and evident in their approach to all the earlier civilizations that had settled in their midst.

Although Nehru's historicist justification of his national ideology was popular and captured the dominant mood of influential groups, it was open to several objections. He was wrong to argue that modern civilization was morally superior. The two standards that he used to establish its superiority—namely, rationalist humanism and mastery of nature—were both derived from it and rendered his argument circular. This is not to say that they are not great values but rather that Nehru does not argue their case and that they are not the only important values in a civilization. Furthermore, although Nehru was right to insist on the need for modernization, he was wrong to take an essentialist and totalist view of it, and ascribe to it an inexorable logic. Modernization was not an undifferentiated package that had to be accepted or rejected in toto. Its constituent elements such as industrialization, rationalism, individualism, liberal democracy, the state, technology, scientific world view, and instrumental approach to the natural world were not all logically related. They had come together in Europe as a result of contingent historical factors and could be combined differently in different societies, and some of them could even be dropped. It was therefore open to India to develop its own distinct model of modernization. The alternatives of catching up with the West or going under were unduly restrictive, and foreclosed a number of options.

Even if one accepted Nehru's national philosophy in its entirety, one could disagree with his definitions of or ways of realizing its constituent goals. There was no obvious reason why secularism should mean state indifference to religion rather than equal public respect for all of them. Nehru's austere and narrow secularism did not exist even in Britain, the US, and many other Western countries and created the problems discussed earlier. This is not to say that his view was wrong but rather that some others were better. This was also true of the other 'national goals'. India could have opted for a participatory and bottom-up democracy as it did several decades later or for other forms of democracy than the liberal. It could have explored a home-grown variety of socialism, a decentralized and participatory form of planning, and a form of industrialization that gave priority to the right to employment and satisfaction of basic needs rather than growth defined in terms of gross domestic product.

Nehru then failed to make out a convincing case for his national ideology. That did not, however, prevent it from acquiring political dominance. In the battle of ideologies, victory generally goes to the one that represents the views and interests of dominant groups, is vague enough to permit a variety of glosses, is apophthegmatic enough to be easily appropriated by the masses, has a reasonably clear rationale, and enjoys political patronage and global respectability. Nehru's ideology scored better on all these points than its rivals. It reflected the political consciousness of the Westernized elite to whom it assigned a crucial role in the construction of the new state. Not surprisingly, they were its ardent champions both before and after Independence. Almost all Indians were enthusiastic about the goals of national unity, a strong state, and even non-alignment. The big bourgeoisie welcomed industrialization and parliamentary democracy. And though they were hostile to socialism, their hostility diminished once Nehru gave the private sector an important role and played down equitable distribution. The middle and upper peasantry welcomed many of his goals including socialism, which guaranteed high prices for its products and a supply of fertilizers and other material needed for agricultural production at relatively low and stable prices. It was strongly opposed to his agrarian reforms and used its growing political power to frustrate them. The expanding and well-paid public sector created a huge, privileged, and state-dependent class of managers, technicians, and workers with a strong commitment to Nehru's national philosophy. The minorities felt safe with Nehru's secularism. Sections of working classes, the urban and rural poor, the unemployed, the parties of the Left, groups of Gandhians, and the Hindu militants were the least attracted to Nehru's ideology.

Nehru's national philosophy then represented the optimum common programme acceptable to most Indians. He increased its appeal by keeping it vague and revising it under pressure. Passionately convinced that it held the key to India's future, Nehru threw all his enormous personal and political authority behind it. He identified himself with it, became its living and inspiring symbol, and fought for it with immense energy and passion. He used every conceivable occasion to convince his countrymen of its vital importance, and mocked, ridiculed, and attacked its critics with almost fatidical certainty. He marginalized, neutralized, or positively won over the Gandhians by flattering them or giving them a limited role. He used the power of the state to popularize the national

philosophy among the young and secured the support of the influential film industry. He campaigned for it even when elections were not involved, and pressed it in his replies to most of the nearly 2,000 letters he received daily and to answering which he devoted four to five hours.

Nehru was determined that India's national philosophy should be 'settled once and for all'⁴⁰ and accepted as the 'absolute' and unquestioned premise of the Indian state. At the start of the country's historical journey, Nehru provided it with a most coherent statement of its national identity and gave it a clear sense of direction. During his 17 years in power, he succeeded in making it so self-evident that those challenging it appeared reactionary, obscurantist, and even anti-national. Rather than one vision of India competing with others for popular support, it became a new orthodoxy guiding and also limiting the Indian political imagination and practice, and discouraging serious debate for fear of breaking up the country or holding it back. Not surprisingly, it became the inescapable point of reference for Nehru's successors. Whether they followed him or rejected him, they took their bearings from and defined themselves in relation to it. Shaping the nation's thought in such a profound way and firing a whole generation of men and women with his inspirational idealism, confidence, and hope for a better India was a historic achievement that makes him not only a great prime minister but also the founder of the modern Indian state.

RETHINKING THE NATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Nehru could not hope to implement his national philosophy without an appropriate institutional structure. Given his model of modernization, he had four institutions available to him, the Parliament, the cabinet, the Congress party, and the bureaucracy. He greatly respected the Parliament, valued its role, and paid close attention to its views. He set up parliamentary committees, some such as the influential Estimate Committee in the teeth of much hostility. He also set up consultative committees in which Members of Parliament (MPs) of all political parties had opportunities to discuss and generate new departmental policies. He encouraged debates on important issues and helped create both an informed public opinion and consensually based policies. On several occasions, the Parliament spoke for the nation and surprised the government, of which the reaction to the 'Voice of America' deal in 1963 and the debates on Nehru's China policy were good examples.

While all this was most commendable, the Parliament had its obvious limits. Since it could neither execute policies nor monitor their implementation, its role was largely supervisory and regulative. Its interest in any subject was necessarily episodic, fragmentary, discontinuous, and partisan. Had Nehru involved the Parliament in the general running of the country by bringing it into sustained and institutionalized contact with government departments, as several radical democrats urged him to do, it would have been more effective. He did try it on a couple of occasions but gave in to ministerial resistance.

In the early years, Nehru's cabinet consisted of the stalwarts of the Independence movement who had their own ideas on how the country should move towards its agreed goals and did not hesitate to disagree with him. Although he was not always at ease with disagreement, especially when it related to his vision of India, he had little choice but to work with them in a spirit of equality and compromise. Once they were gone, he tended to appoint 'quiet and rather colourless men of uncertain ability and distinction whose merit has been to avoid giving or taking offence'.¹ Cabinet meetings were like tutorials, with Nehru doing most of the talking, rather than centres of creative conflict and independent thought. Even the chief ministers who once were men of considerable stature and sources of critical advice and resistance came to be replaced by those of little political and intellectual weight. Not surprisingly, Nehru's letters to them over time became increasingly patronizing and preachy.

As a result of the constraints of the independence struggle and Gandhi's concern to make it a movement for both political independence and social regeneration, the Congress was not a conventional political party based on a clearly defined set of objectives. A loose and porous coalition of major interest groups sharing little in common, it imposed little internal discipline and left its members free to disagree with its policies in public. It included a variety of formal and informal organizations, allowed outside bodies including other political parties to operate within it through their proxies, and indiscriminately brought in new groups without requiring commitment to its basic values and programme.

After Independence, Nehru needed to redesign both its structure and role and make it an effective instrument of government. So far as the structure of the party was concerned, he could have turned it into a disciplined and cadre-based political party committed to carrying out a clearly stated programme, or at least an internally democratic and well-organized party based on a set of broad principles. As for its role, he could have used it as a vehicle for winning elections, training leaders, providing coherence to and a check on the government, and settling internal party disputes. Or he could have used it as a general sounding board and a channel of diffused interaction between the government and its supporters. Or more ambitiously, he could have turned it into a powerful tool of social transformation acting as a bridge between

the state and society, generating new ideas and policies, mobilizing the masses, and recruiting and integrating such excluded groups as the working classes and the rural and urban poor.

Unlike Gandhi and Sardar Patel, Nehru showed poor political imagination and courage in organizational matters. At the structural level, he did little to make the Congress a disciplined party and left it more or less as he had inherited it. As for its role, he gave little time and thought to the subject and said very little about it in his hundreds of post-Independence speeches. Thanks to the departure of the socialists and other radical groups, he felt encircled by right-wing groups within the Congress and thought it prudent to ignore it altogether. Since he knew that he could rely on his personal charisma to win elections, he did not need it as an electoral tool. He had already decided on the national ideology and saw no need to rely on it to generate new ideas. And since he increasingly found most of its members 'dull', 'reactionary', and 'small-minded', and felt socially uncomfortable with them, he did not expect it to play a socially transformative role either.

After his conflict with Sardar Patel over the election of Tandon, Nehru resolved upon a contradictory course of action. He feared the power of the Congress and more or less completely took it over, becoming and remaining its president for several years, and later handing it over to his loyal lieutenants including his daughter. He subordinated its organizational wing to the ministerial wing and insisted that government ministers at the central and state levels were not accountable to it. Decisions as to who should contest elections and from which constituencies were made by the high command in Delhi. Marginalization of the Congress, and centralization and personalization of power within it provoked considerable criticism but without much effect. Kripalani, the Congress president in 1947, urged that the party should become 'the living and effective link between the government and the people' and the 'barometer of people's will and temper'. He was ignored and chose to resign. Even Dhebar, a loyal supporter who in his last days as Congress president criticized Nehru for his intolerance of party criticism, was ignored.

The results were predictable. In the absence of a mediating agency between the state and society, the former lacked a mass base and remained remote and insensitive to popular views and sentiments. Nehru was acutely aware of this but did little. The organizational wing,

which had the responsibility to organize elections and mobilize mass support but no political power, became demoralized. The ministerial wing, which had power but was neither accountable to nor checked by the party, tended to become arrogant and corrupt. Even as early as 1948, Nehru began to complain that the Congress was 'losing all values and sinking into the sordidness of opportunist politics'.² Three years later he remarked, 'I have felt recently as if I was in a den of wild animals.' Charges of corruption became so common that he simply did not have the time and the energy to separate the valid and worth investigating from the malicious and flimsy, and either dismissed them out of hand or demanded impossible standards of proof.³ Disputes within the party, which would normally have been internally resolved were brought to him and took up a good deal of his time and energy. Not surprisingly, he increasingly complained of being 'smothered by routine', feeling 'stale and tired', and 'out of touch' with the mood of the country and his party.

While Gandhi understood the importance of the Congress party, especially its organizational wing, but not that of the state, Nehru made the opposite mistake. He failed to appreciate the indispensable ideological, pedagogical, disciplinary, and organizational role of a political party in a vast, diverse, divided, and poor country with only a weak and recent tradition of exercising impersonal power. As a result and often against his own wishes, Indian politics became highly personalized, and 'After Nehru, who?' was one of the most frequently asked questions. He also did not fully realize that in the absence of an organization capable of nurturing and propagating his vision of India, the latter remained vague, diffused, and tended to degenerate into an empty rhetoric. None of his successors understood the crucial role of the Congress either, with the result that it became over time little more than a family-owned recruiting ground for careerists and sycophants.

Having rejected the Congress as a major tool of social transformation and filled the cabinet with mediocre men and women, Nehru turned to the bureaucracy as the central agency to modernize India. His attitude to it, however, was ambivalent. On the one hand, he needed it and up to a point trusted it, but he was also critical of its ethos and approach. It consisted of Westernized men and women who shared Nehru's goals and with whom he felt socially at ease. It was professionally trained and was assumed to be efficient. Since it attracted some of the most

talented individuals in the country, it represented the best available 'human material'. Nehru also thought that since the bureaucracy had a well-developed system of self-discipline and professional ethos and was subject to ministerial, parliamentary, and public scrutiny, it could be counted upon to be guided by the highest norms.

While the bureaucracy had an important state-building role, it also had its limitations. It was a legacy of the Raj, rigidly hierarchical, with a colonial mind set, and claiming proprietary rights over the state. It was intensely jealous of its independence, secretive, and hostile to the public and even the ministerial scrutiny of its actions. Seeing itself as the embodiment of rationality and neutrality in an 'obscurantist' and factious society, it treated the latter as passive material to be moulded as it thought proper and ordinary citizens as supplicants for its favours. Not surprisingly, it displayed the familiar vices of elitism, arrogance, insularity, and self-righteousness. Enjoying great prestige and power and subject to few institutional checks, it also became corrupt. Between 1956 and 1964, over 80,000 complaints were registered with the Administrative Vigilance Division of the Home Ministry, and as many as 63,000 of these were found worth investigating. Major penalties were imposed on about 6,000 officials and minor ones on most of the rest.

Ever since he entered public life in the 1920s, Nehru had repeatedly attacked the Indian Civil Service (ICS) as 'quintessentially colonial', 'neither Indian nor civil nor service', a concentrated reflection of most that was wrong with the Raj. As he put it:⁴

But of one thing I am quite sure, that no new order can be built up in India so long as the spirit of the ICS pervades our administration and our public services. That spirit of authoritarianism is the ally of imperialism, and it cannot co-exist with freedom.... Therefore it seems to me quite essential that the ICS and similar services must disappear completely, as such, before we can start real work on a new order. Individual members of these services... will be welcome, but only on new conditions.

Nehru kept pressing for fundamental and democratic changes in the bureaucracy throughout his years in power but did little, partly because he had no well thought out alternative structure and partly because he had no other institution to counter its resistance. In 1964, the year he died, there were still about 160 ICS officers in senior posts in Delhi and elsewhere, broadly continuing the old style of administration. The

Indian Administrative Service (IAS) was growing fast and had by then 2,100 officers, mostly in comparatively junior posts and broadly sharing the attitudes of their superiors. Nehru neither took interest in their training nor annually addressed the new recruits as a matter of policy. He himself admitted shortly before his death that his greatest failure was not to have transformed the administrative machinery; it was still a 'colonial administration and one of the main causes' of India's inability to solve the problem of poverty.⁵

Nehru's national philosophy, especially his model of industrialization, led to the neglect of agriculture and created further problems for him. Although agriculture was the basis of the Indian economy and employed the vast majority of its population, it enjoyed little importance in Nehru's economic programme and received inadequate funds in the first three Five Year Plans. Nehru thought of the peasantry almost entirely in terms of rich landlords and poor peasants, and had only a limited appreciation of the role of the small and even middle peasantry. When the draft resolution on cooperative farming at the Nagpur Congress session in 1959 proposed that surplus land be vested in the panchayats of 'landless labour and small peasants', he had the reference to small peasants deleted. He was also slow to appreciate the importance of land reforms, especially the security of tenure to tenants, smaller irrigation projects, redistribution of land, and cooperative farming. He thought that, as in Europe, industrialization would spill over into and transform agrarian relations, and that the latter, being condemned to change under the 'inexorable' historical process, did not have to be directly attacked. When he later realized that that was not happening, he advocated land reforms but was defeated by the conservative landed interests, which had by then acquired considerable power in the Congress. Furthermore, cooperative farming, on which he insisted, had no relevance in the context of unequal land holdings and a vast mass of landless labour. The farmers who had taken over from zamindars were not prepared to merge their newly acquired estates in a joint enterprise, and such cooperatives as did exist were exploited by a small number of families to their advantage.

Nehru had stressed both economic growth and equitable redistribution. He now found that while the former was proceeding at a moderate pace, the latter was nowhere in sight. Indeed economic growth intensified the existing inequalities, swelled the ranks of the

poor and unemployed, and made India a deeply divided and unstable society. The big bourgeoisie, some sections of the petty bourgeoisie, and the upper and middle peasantry improved their prospects, but landless labourers, poor peasants, and industrial workers gained little. Prosperity did trickle down but only to a limited degree. Nehru had set out to build socialism but found that he had done little more than broaden the base of capitalism, leaving intact many of the evils he had attacked before Independence. He found too that a small modern sector had absorbed most of the savings and starved the rest of the economy of vital resources.

Nehru sought to build India from the top down and relied on the elite to leaven the masses and set the tone and pace of development. In politics, the state was the centre of national life. Within the state, the central government was dominant. And within it, Nehru, helped by the elite administrative service, played the decisive role. In the economic realm, central planning and the public sector were the major instruments of modernization. And within the public sector, heavy industries and huge irrigation projects were assigned a crucial transformative role. In the field of education, Nehru concentrated on universities, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and centres of advanced research and training. In the cultural arena, he concentrated on the 'high culture' of the elite and set up literary, artistic, and other academies. He sought to foster a 'scientific temper' among his countrymen not by setting up countless small centres of scientific education all over the country or improving school laboratories but by establishing such elite and centralized institutions as the five IITs and about 30 research laboratories. The belief in the so-called trickle-down effect was not confined to the economy but extended to almost all areas of organized life.

Since political initiative and power were concentrated in the state, the various sources of political power that Gandhi had opened up and the several channels that he had dug for its smooth flow dried up. As the only conduit through which various parts of society related to one another, the nascent Indian state became a party to all major disputes and the sole centre of political ambition and energy. Not surprisingly, it found it difficult to cope with the resulting pressures, and its actions showed haste and unprincipled compromises. Although Nehru's personal charisma acted as a great shock absorber and deflected or diffused

some of these tensions, it was clear that troubles were being stored up for the future.

When the cumulative impact of his policies became evident around the late 1950s, Nehru got worried. To his great credit, he encouraged a nationwide debate, welcomed and himself asked critical questions about his model of development, and started revising it in several important respects. He too was convinced of the importance of the state to opt for the alternative model of forging a partnership between it and the people and involving them in the task of national development. However, he recognized that the remote and bureaucratic state needed to be opened up, embedded in the daily lives of its people, and allow for their greater participation. He could not simply take over the colonial state and expect it to achieve democratic goals as he had done so far; he needed to redesign it radically and democratize its internal structures and mode of operation.

From the mid-1950s onwards, the Community Development Programme, an imaginative experiment in local democracy, had been under way, initiated on a small scale under the guidance of American foundations and later extended with the help of funds from the American government. Though the Nehru government had welcomed it, he did not assign it much importance. As the reports by the Project Evaluation Organisation, individual investigators and finally by the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee pointed out, the programme remained confined to a small area covering barely a quarter of the rural population in 1956, and was bureaucratic and rigid. Instead of stimulating self-help, it had increased dependence on the government. And far from helping the poorer sections of society, it had been appropriated by the dominant groups. The way to deal with all this, the critics argued, was to integrate the Community Development Programme into a new system of fully democratic local government. Nehru welcomed the idea and decided to change course.

Local bodies at the village, block, and district levels were now given considerable political power, including the power to control the regular and community development officials. Thanks to the new mood of the time and the replacement of the imported American programme by one with indigenous roots, the latter took off and even brought with it a new vocabulary. The new system was called Panchayati Raj, a historically evocative term, the block development officer was called

vikās adhikari, and such terms as *panchayat samiti* and *zila parishad* came into vogue. Nehru liked and popularized the new vocabulary and pressured state governments to introduce the new system of local government. Between 1959 and 1962, the number of block development officers and village local workers increased nearly threefold. In their work and orientation, they were like Gandhi's *samagra gramsevak*s, working closely with the masses, and both educating and, in turn, being educated by them. Nehru became an enthusiastic advocate of the Panchayati Raj. It was a truly revolutionary movement; it strengthened India at its very roots, vitalized democratic institutions at higher levels, prepared millions to shoulder public responsibility, and encouraged local initiative and self-reliance. 'I have full confidence in its success, because I have full confidence in the Indian people.'⁶ He went on, we must give power to the people even though it leads to hell. The village communities and the human material, which he had often ridiculed earlier, were now seen as a source of Indian regeneration. They knew the local situation better than the 'experts in Delhi' and were well equipped to discipline the arrogant, inefficient, and corrupt bureaucracy. Having so far largely taken over and functioned within the framework of parliamentary democracy, Nehru now began to stress the need to broaden its base and even to move beyond it. The Indian masses whose political participation was hitherto limited to voting in elections were now involved in the task of national development and running the different layers of government.

As the villages grew in political importance, they and the activities associated with them received greater economic and cultural recognition. 'I am all for industry, I am all for steel plants... but I do say agriculture is far more important than any industry.'⁷ Agriculture had to be the first and essential component, indeed the basis, of the new strategy of economic development. 'In India almost everything begins with agriculture... industry itself depends on the growth of agriculture... out of agriculture grows industry.' He condemned the 'disease of gigantism', with which he had himself been hitherto infected. He thought that the large dams on which he had so far relied were too expensive, used up a lot of foreign exchange, took a long time to complete, and yielded little except electric power and limited irrigation. He now preferred little power stations and small-scale irrigation projects. He observed:⁸

For sometime past, however, I have been beginning to think that we are suffering from what we may call 'disease of gigantism'.... This is a dangerous outlook developing in India. I think that while, inevitably, we shall have to undertake big schemes or tasks in this country, we should always remember that it is the ten thousand small tasks that count ultimately much more than a few big once. It is, as you also referred to it, Mr. President, the small irrigation projects, the small industries and the small plants for electric power, which will change the face of the country, far more than half a dozen big projects in half a dozen places.

Again, I am not, for instance, saying that we should not have big projects. ... I merely wish, if I can, to *replace the balance in our thinking*, which has shifted too much towards gigantic schemes... But this is all the relic of gigantism to which we have fallen a prey. We have to realize that we can also meet our problems much more rapidly and efficiently by taking up a large number of small schemes, especially when the time involved in a small scheme is much less and the results obtained are rapid. Further, in those small schemes you can get a good deal of what is called public co-operation, and therefore, there is much social value in associating people with such small schemes.

Nehru now stressed the need for new models of land reforms. Land reforms were required not only on moral but also economic grounds. When Wolf Ladejinsky of the Ford Foundation pointed out to him that granting tenants ownership rights and security of tenure increased productivity, Nehru agreed and asked his party to campaign for them and the state governments to enact appropriate legislation. He saw too that land holdings did not have to be large in order to be optimally productive and pointed to the example of Japan where small holdings produced high yields. As if disowning his own past, he observed, 'the fact of the matter is that we, all of us who talk so much, have not got out of the old zamindari mentality. We think in terms of large acres, large areas.'⁹

The appreciation of the importance of agriculture went hand in hand with its cultural revaluation. For long, Nehru had viewed it as a culturally inferior activity to be attached to the coat tails of the historically progressive industry and regarded the peasantry as a narrow-minded, fatalistic, and reactionary group, only fit to follow the lead given by the Westernized middle classes and the industrialists. Not surprisingly, the peasantry had felt devalued and slighted, a disturbing experience for a group that had enjoyed high cultural and political visibility during the

struggle for Independence. It now began to be treated with respect and was referred to by the evocative name of *kisan* (whose cousin the *jawan* was also now acquiring importance). Neither idealized as the custodian of the traditional civilization as Gandhi had done nor regarded as the enemy of the modern as Nehru had hitherto done, the peasantry was now viewed as a rational and calculating agent responding to financial incentives and capable of making proper use of state help and scientific inputs. Its problems and needs began to attract as much attention as those of the industrialists from politicians, civil servants, scientists, technologists, and financial institutions. The result was the beginning of the Green Revolution, which banished the food scarcity endemic during most of the Nehru era.

In this changed perspective, Nehru began to appreciate the importance of primary and secondary education to which he had hitherto paid only limited attention. Ignoring it so long, he said, was 'a tragedy, nothing short of a tragedy. I do not wish to use milder terms because the whole progress of India depends on the educational apparatus working from the bottom to the top.'¹⁰ The keenly expected trickle-down effect had not materialized because the poor lacked the ability to take advantage of the opportunities offered to them. Primary and secondary education provided part of the answer. It created a body of literate and well informed citizens capable of understanding the economic and political system, taking initiative and standing up for their rights. 'I am convinced that it is better to do without some industrial growth than to do without adequate education at the base.'¹¹

Nehru also began to stress the importance of the Congress party, which he had hitherto ignored. He said it had a vital role to play in educating and mobilizing the masses, and was not just an electoral machine but an 'agent of social transformation'. It brought the state and society together into a 'fertilizing contact' and ensured that the former did not get out of touch with the masses. It was ideally equipped to propagate the 'national ideology' among the youth and harness their energies for the cause of national regeneration. Only a strong Congress could hold together such a vast and diverse country as India and provide an effective check on the government. The Congress therefore had to be 'revitalized', built from below, and fashioned into a 'self-disciplined' and 'cadre-based' organization. Its ideological and organizational basis had to be strengthened and its role increased so that political ambition

and energy could be directed away from office seeking. Accordingly, he now insisted that its organizational wing was just as important as, indeed more important than, the ministerial. One served the country not merely by occupying a government office but also by building the party and working amongst and empowering the people. It was in this context that Nehru eagerly welcomed the Kamaraj Plan. It did, of course, enable him to get rid of Morarji Desai and others, and even perhaps clear the way for his daughter to succeed him, but there is no reason to disbelieve him when he said that 'it was an idea taking hold of the mind and growing by itself'.¹² He had been stressing the importance of the organizational work for some years past, especially after the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the gains of the Swatantra Party in the 1962 elections only three years after its birth, and the Congress losses in three by-elections in 1963.

Nehru also began to stress socialism more than before and to give it a more specific content.¹³ The resolution on 'Democracy and Socialism' passed at the annual Congress session in Bhubaneswar in January 1964, just four months before his death, was a striking example of this. The Congress now reiterated its claim to work for a revolution in the economic and social relationships in Indian society, and the elimination of privilege, disparities, and exploitation. It demanded limits on income and property in private hands, especially inherited wealth and urban property, urged much heavier taxes on unearned income, and stopped just short of committing itself to bank nationalization. It pressed for a further expansion of the public sector, particularly in the field of heavy and basic industry as well as trade in essential commodities, and reaffirmed its new commitment to land reforms. Realizing that all this by itself did not mean much to the common man, the Congress committed itself to providing a national minimum comprising the essential requirements in respect of food, clothing, housing, education, and health by the end of the fifth Five Year Plan. Rarely before had the Congress passed such a detailed and radical resolution. Much of this was political rhetoric and was not followed up by appropriate policies, but it was indicative of Nehru's new mood.

A fine sense of historical continuity missing since 1947 now began to make an appearance, and Nehru increasingly stressed the need to link the country's past and future. He attacked 'rootless' and 'glib modernizers', and insisted that wherever possible new institutions and practices

should be built on the foundations of the old. He urged that India's traditional village communities could form the basis of Panchayati Raj and cooperative farming. Like any other country India had 'a certain special peculiarity and special genius' and risked losing its bearings if it ignored it. At the same time it also needed to assimilate the new and keep abreast of the world. That involved a 'synthesis between what we consider of value in the old and... in the new'. The central problem for the country was how to modernize itself without becoming 'rootless and sapless'.¹⁴

During the last few years of his life, Nehru was courageously revising his earlier model of modernization. His total commitment to his national philosophy remained, and he saw no need to compromise on any of its seven basic goals. His revision largely related to the method of realizing it, especially the two goals of parliamentary democracy and industrialization where he thought he had got the balance wrong. He also saw that both the top and the base, the state and society, the elite and the masses, the universities and the primary schools, the heavy as well as small industries, industry and agriculture, the past and the future were equally important. India could not be developed unless the complementary bottom-up and top-down processes were integrated, and modern institutions embedded in the suitably regenerated indigenous values and practices. Accordingly, he reconsidered some of his old policies and priorities and planned several new initiatives. He was by now too old and tired and too deeply saddened by the Sino-Indian war to have the energy to strike out on a new path. However, he had begun to map out its broad outlines that Lal Bahadur Shastri largely followed and built upon. There was no radical discontinuity between the older Nehru and Shastri, rather a difference of emphasis and style.

The older Nehru then had begun to move from uncritical to critical modernism, from a mechanical and indiscriminate adoption of the Western model and path of modernization to one suited to the Indian conditions. Like Gandhi, he showed greater sensitivity to India's cultural identity, placed more confidence in its people, and paid greater attention to the need to build the base than he had done hitherto. However, he remained as unsympathetic towards the end of his political life as he had been at the beginning to Gandhi's hostility to large-scale industrialization, social conservatism, deep suspicion of the state, and a pinched and moralistic view of human life. He saw clearly that India's

traditional resources were for more exiguous than Gandhi and other traditionalists liked to believe, and that the modern civilization had far more to offer to India and opened up a greater range of new possibilities than they realized.

Nehru has been subject to much criticism since his death, especially in recent years. Some of it was mentioned earlier in this chapter and the previous one, and more could have been added to it. His China policy was a muddle, and on Kashmir he was neither ruthless enough to drive away the Pakistan-supported tribal invaders nor democratic enough to hold a plebiscite. He genuinely hoped to solve the problem by establishing better relations with Pakistan (even proposing a confederation of the two countries) and respecting Kashmir's desire for greater autonomy but lacked a coherent policy and reliable negotiating partners. He did nothing to reorganize the Congress party and wasted a great opportunity to turn it into a powerful instrument of social transformation. Although his talk of socialism kept the question of social justice on the public agenda, it amounted to little in practice. Inequality grew and the poor did not get even the most basic services. Nehru was a poor judge of men, found it difficult to deal with equals, and built no team to carry forward his legacy. His style of governance, though not authoritarian, was 'headmasterly' and his cabinet meetings were often like tutorials. He could also be petty. He refused to attend Ambedkar's funeral and might have done the same with that of Rajendra Prasad if Dr Radhakrishnan had not put pressure on him. He remained too much in awe of the West, especially England; judged himself and his country by its opinion; and unwittingly reinforced his countrymen's overdependence on Western recognition.

Notwithstanding these and other limitations, his achievements were considerable. He courageously stood up to Gandhi, not often politically but almost always ideologically, and committed India to the path of modernization, a no mean achievement. He gave the country an unambiguous definition of its identity and saw to it that it took deep roots in and became part of national self-consciousness. He gave Indians self-confidence, pride, the inspiration to entertain big dreams, and fired them with the zeal to raise their voice against the injustices and inequities of their society. He nurtured parliamentary democracy in a way no one else could have done, and ensured that India remained firmly committed to it and made it the basis of its self-respect and

pride. Unlike Rajaji and even Patel, he was not just a Congress leader but, like Gandhi and Bose, a national leader who rose above his party and had an independent mass base and point of view, which is partly why Gandhi declared him his political heir and which, with some aberrations, he remained during his long tenure of office. He gave India an international orientation and built great scientific, research, and other institutions whose talented products gave and continue to give it a global intellectual presence. Although rather narrow, his form of secularism, which he did so much to popularize, was basically sound in its inspiration and, in one form or another, a political necessity in a country like India. Above all, Nehru set the inspiring example of a Prime Minister with an unimpeachable personal integrity, deep love of India, total dedication to its welfare, absence of any trace of communalism, and the humility to publicly acknowledge his mistakes and the courage to change course.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE INDIAN DEMOCRACY

The ideas, practices, and institutions associated with democracy are invariably shaped by the history, traditions, economic structure, and culture of the wider society, and hence no two democracies are alike. Indian democracy exhibits several features that are unique to it. It is the largest in the world and its size structures the political experiences and imagination of its citizens. It was introduced in its fully fledged form at one go, and such popular struggle as preceded it was largely part of that for Independence rather than specifically for democracy. Political equality in India preceded social equality, given by the Constitution in a hierarchical society and was not an extension of the pre-existing social equality as in much of the West. Elections in India are not only a political but also a social and cultural phenomenon, asserting the dignity and power and transforming the consciousness of those at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy. Family connections play a far greater role in Indian politics, and dynasties proliferate at all levels of government to a far greater degree than in almost any other democracy. Unique among democracies, religious minorities in India enjoy greater freedom from state interference than the majority. The poor vote in larger numbers than the middle classes but have done little with their electoral power. In this chapter, I reflect on these and other distinguishing features of Indian democracy and explore what makes it Indian not only in its geographical referent but also its inner structure and identity.

Both a Democracy and a Republic

Although India is a democracy, this does not fully describe what the authors of its Constitution had in mind. The Congress resolution on the Objectives of the Constitution moved by Jawaharlal Nehru in the Constituent Assembly on 20 November 1946 included the word 'republic' but not 'democracy'. When asked why, he replied that the former 'included' the latter. His reply implied that the term republic was wider than and did not mean exactly the same as democracy, but he did not spell out the difference. After some weeks when the first draft of the Constitution was introduced, it included the word 'democracy' but dropped the word 'republic'. Its final draft had both and declared India a 'democratic republic'. For its authors, the country was meant to be not just a democracy but also a republic, and it has since 1950 celebrated a republic day separately from its Independence day and given it a very different orientation.¹ This raises the question of what they meant by the two terms and why they did not think either enough. The two terms are also translated by different words with different histories and meanings in vernacular languages (*prajasatta* or *ganarajya* as different from *lokshahi*).

It is often argued that India was declared a republic because rather than retain the British monarch as its formal head as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand had done, it chose to elect its own. While this is true, it is not enough. Since India had made that choice sometime ago, it does not explain why the Constituent Assembly vacillated over what to call the country. More importantly, it stresses only the formal features of the idea of the republic and ignores the deeper meaning and significance it had for its advocates.

Many leading Indians from the mid-nineteenth century onwards were fascinated by and had written admiringly about the Indian and Western republics from their different perspectives. The republican idea was particularly popular among the spokesmen of the Scheduled and 'lower' castes. Jotirao Phule, one of their ablest and earliest spokesmen, had read and was influenced by the Western republican writers including Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*,² and praised the republican spirit of equality, love of liberty, and commitment to public well-being. He attributed the post-Renaissance resurgence of Europe to the rise of the republics and the decline of India to the overthrow of the Buddhist republics by the Brahmanic monarchies.³ Ambedkar took a broadly

similar view and was particularly interested in the French and American republics. He studied the latter closely during his years at Columbia University, wrote and lectured on the subject, and made a powerful case for making India a republic. He admired the French revolution of 1789 and its 'republican' and egalitarian spirit. His Independent Labour Party (founded in 1931) was later called the Republican Party of India. Although this happened after his death, he had already set the wheels in motion.

Several mainstream liberal and socialists leaders too were great admirers of the republican form of government. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote about the modern European republics in his *Glimpses of World History*, praising their great virtues such as civic courage, public spirit, egalitarian ethos, and love of freedom,⁴ and was most enthusiastic about the French revolution. He declared himself a republican in his Presidential address at the Lahore session of Congress in 1929 and came close to equating republicanism with socialism. J.P. Narayan, Lohia, Narendra Dev, M.N. Roy, and others shared his view.

Although these and other advocates of the republic drew their inspiration from different sources and stressed its different features, they shared a broad consensus on what it meant and why it was important.⁵ For them, it overlapped with but was not the same as democracy and referred primarily to neither an elected head of state nor even a form of government as democracy did but to a political and social order characterized by four important features. These were social and economic equality, the state as a public institution, an active and public-spirited citizenship, and separation of powers.

The republic was taken to be the opposite of monarchy, be it absolute or constitutional. For Nehru, Ambedkar, and others, the latter represented not just a form of government but a hierarchically structured political and social order with the king at its apex. The king was supported by an aristocracy whose interests and authority were bound with his and who together with him formed a dominant and more or less tightly knit group. For Nehru, monarchy divided society into two classes, the privileged and powerful few with their arrogance and snobbery and the common people devoid of dignity and social status and leading a life of deference and humiliation.⁶

The republic was based on the opposite principle of social equality. Its citizens enjoyed equal dignity, respect, status, and opportunity; had

no masters or a superior class of people above them; and were the ultimate source of all political authority. Its unity sprang not from an external source as in a monarchy but from their shared sense of community and allegiance to freely adopted legal and political institutions. There was not only no monarch at the apex of the social system but also no monarch-like figures of power at other levels. Nehru put it well when he said that as a republican he was opposed not only to the kings and princes but also to 'the order which produces the modern kings of industry who have generated power over the lives and fortunes of men more than the kings of old'.⁷ Ambedkar too defined republicanism in terms of extensive social and economic equality and even equated it with some form of socialism that was needed to create and sustain that equality. Following Machiavelli, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and other republican writers, he, Nehru, and others thought that the republican ethos of equality required that economic divisions in society should be considerably narrowed and the extremes at both ends abolished.

Second, the republic stood for the idea that the state was a public institution. As the Drafting Committee of which Ambedkar was the chairman put it, 'republic means *res publica*, literally public property'.⁸ The state was not the private property of its rulers to do what they like with it but belonged to all its citizens equally. It subjected the exercise of power to institutional constraints, dealt with matters of common concern, and its affairs were conducted publicly, in a participatory spirit, and aimed at the common good rather than the interests of a particular group including the majority.

Active, public-spirited citizenship and the virtues associated with it was the third defining feature of the republic. Its citizens regarded the state as theirs, identified with it, took ownership of it, made sacrifices for it, and exhibited such qualities as love of liberty, sense of social justice, and patriotism. They saw themselves not as private individuals or members of particular religious, regional, or ethnic communities but as citizens or public persons sharing a common identity and committed to the well being of their community. In a democracy, citizens might use their political influence and power to promote their own or their group's narrow interests. Such an attitude undermined the very spirit of the republic.⁹

The separation of powers and the related idea of checks and balances was the fourth constitutive feature of the republic, stressed by

some but not all Indian republicans. In a monarchy, political power was centralized and not subject to constitutional constraints. Even in a democracy, the elected legislature could wield supreme power and treat the unelected judiciary as a subordinate organ of government. By contrast, a republic had the system of checks and balances built into its very structure. Both Nehru and Ambedkar approvingly referred to Montesquieu's doctrine of the separation of powers and laid particular stress on the independence of the judiciary—the only reliable guardian of the liberties and freedoms of individuals, which the other two branches of government for their own different reasons tended to take lightly. Ambedkar, who had closely observed and studied the American Constitution, placed particular emphasis on this point in his lectures on the subject as well as in the Constituent Assembly debates. Not surprisingly, Article 50 of the Constitution explicitly enjoins the state to 'take steps to separate the judiciary from the executive'.

Historically, the idea of republic has been closely associated with those of revolution and new beginning. Since a republic was generally established in a monarchical or aristocratic polity, it involved a revolutionary overthrow of the old order, reconstituting the polity on the basis of a new Constitution, and giving the future generations a unique and inspirational point of reference. Nehru, Ambedkar, and other republicans were fascinated by revolutions and the republics they created, particularly the French. Ambedkar even borrowed the language of the French Revolution and thought that the trinity of liberty, equality, and fraternity best summed up the guiding principles of a republic. In a speech commending the Objectives Resolution to the Constituent Assembly on 13 December 1946, Nehru too referred to the French Revolution and drew a parallel between the French National Assembly and the Indian Constituent Assembly.¹⁰ In wanting to declare India a republic, these and other leaders wanted to link up with the revolutionary republican tradition, signal a new historical beginning for India, and give its people a new sense of themselves. While Independence was 'given' by an outsider, the republic was chosen by the Indians themselves and expressed their sovereignty and free collective will. It had a great substantive and symbolic content, which is why its architects took particular pride in it, celebrated it separately from Independence, and made its celebration a participatory and unifying occasion.

Although a republic is in principle committed to equality, it has often rested on a narrow political basis. Classical republican Rome established equality among its citizens but excluded slaves, women, and others from citizenship. The Buddhist republics were broad based but sometimes excluded Shudras and other 'lower' castes from equal membership of the *gana* and *ganasabha*. True to the republican spirit, the American republic declared all men equal but in practice excluded blacks, women, native Americans, and others. For the authors of the Indian Constitution, a republic was acceptable only if it was built on a democratic foundation and granted universal franchise. This is why they wanted India to be a democratic republic and frequently invoked the French Revolution, the first in history in their view to marry democracy and republic.¹¹

Under the Constitution, India has a dual political identity. It is both a democracy and a republic, a democracy with a republican orientation and ethos, and a republic resting on a democratic foundation. Democracy defines its form of government; republic the guiding principles of its political and social order. Its democratic identity is evident in its electoral provisions, the chapter on fundamental rights, and so on; and the republican identity, in the Preamble, the emphasis on social equality and affirmative action, and the Directive Principles of State Policy that are not merely aspirational but intended to guide governance. To call India a democracy is to utter a half-truth. It largely stresses the elections and basic individual rights, important as they are, and obscures the country's commitment to such goals as social and economic equality, fraternity, and integrity of the public realm that its republican identity connotes. It is both puzzling and unfortunate that the idea of the republic and all it stands for has virtually dropped out of view in independent India, and the entire political space is dominated by the discourse of democracy.

The performance of the Indian polity is best judged by the five criteria that are central to its identity as a democratic republic. These are popular sovereignty and active citizenship, free and fair elections, public deliberation or the exercise of public reason in the conduct of public affairs, institutional morality or respect for norms regulating public offices and exercise of power, and the pursuit of collective well-being including not only the satisfaction of basic needs but also a considerable degree of economic equality. I shall examine how the Indian polity fares in each of these areas.

Popular Sovereignty

Independent India took the historically unprecedented step of introducing adult universal franchise at one go and that too in a largely illiterate and poor country with a hierarchically structured society. Universal franchise first appeared on the political agenda in the early 1890s; by the mid-1920s, almost all major groups had accepted it as the only legitimate way to constitute the state. Hardly anyone argued that the higher castes (or the propertied classes) alone should have votes or more votes than the lower castes (or the poor). Even some of those who refused to accept the untouchables as social equals more or less accepted them as political equals. Although some members of the Constituent Assembly expressed unease about introducing universal franchise, they were in a tiny minority and their objection was more in the nature of a vague fear than a deep conviction.

This is *prima facie* puzzling and requires an explanation. Briefly and broadly speaking, universal adult franchise or political equality largely came to India on the back of nationalism and had a distinct logic. In the West, it was embedded in and grew out of liberal individualism for which every human being had dignity or intrinsic worth and the natural rights arising out of it, and was equal to the rest. The moral and social equality sought political expression and led to the demand for universal adult franchise. In India, it took a different route. In the course of their anti-colonial struggle, Indian leaders argued that they were a nation, a united people with a strong collective identity who demanded and deserved independence on the same grounds as the European nations. All Indians were part of the nation, were Indians in the same sense as the rest, and hence equal. Although divided by castes, they were united by their shared identity as Indians. Their political equality was not an extension or entailment of the pre-existing social equality as in the West; rather it was derived from their national identity and superimposed upon and coexisted with their social inequality. Once Indians had achieved political equality, it became the basis of their demand for social equality. It was this contradiction between the constitutionally given political equality and the traditionally prescribed social inequality that Ambedkar highlighted in his famous concluding speech in the Constituent Assembly.

While making the people the ultimate political authority, the Indian Constitution gives them no formal role in the governance of

the country beyond electing their representatives. They have no right to recall them, to be regularly consulted by them, or to express their views through referenda and other such devices. Once elected, the representatives are free to govern the country as they please and need pay no regard to their constituents' views beyond what is required by electoral considerations. To put the point differently, the Constitution establishes a representative government rather than a representative democracy, a government run by the representatives as they think proper rather than one run by the people through their constantly interacting and accountable representatives. It is striking that one can even become a prime minister as Manmohan Singh did without fighting an election and that the chief ministers of three large states—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra—could do the same. The former came through the Rajya Sabha and the latter through largely redundant second chambers.

The Parliament can amend the Constitution by a simple or two-thirds majority without popular consultation. The Constitution seems to put no limits on the substance of amendments as was evident during the Emergency when the 42nd Amendment introduced extensive changes some of which undermined basic democratic principles. The Supreme Court has ruled that the Parliament cannot amend the 'basic features' or 'structure' of the Constitution. These are supposed to include secularism and the power of judicial review under Articles 32, 226, 227, and so on, but not the right to property and fundamental rights. In the absence of constitutional guidance, it is not clear how the Supreme Court or any other body is to decide what falls within this category. One might argue that the principle of popular sovereignty is basic to the Constitution and that highly controversial amendments should be put to the people, or that at least the principle of parliamentary sovereignty is basic to the Constitution and that when the Supreme Court has serious doubts about an amendment, it should refer it back to the Parliament for further consideration rather than decide the matter itself. There is also the further question about whether the Court should have the right to freeze the basic features of the Constitution and deny people and their representatives the right to change what they had decided in 1950.

The Directive Principles set out pretty radical social and economic goals. As many as half of them relate to equality or social justice in

one form or another, and require, among other things, that every citizen should have an adequate means of livelihood, that inequalities of income should be minimized, and that wealth and the means of production should not be concentrated in a few hands. If fully implemented, they require fairly extensive amendments to the Constitution, including the provisions relating to Fundamental Rights, and these can be passed by a two-thirds majority of the Parliament. The Supreme Court has ruled that laws enacted in the pursuit of Directive Principles are valid even if they abridge Fundamental Rights. This means that these rights are not what they claim to be and remain at the mercy of parliamentary majority. Even those favouring radical goals rightly feel concerned about this, especially as it might restrict not just the right to property but also the rights to liberty, freedom of expression, and association.

During the sixty odd years of its existence, the basis of Indian democracy has widened. It is less centralized, the states enjoy greater autonomy, and political power has been devolved to the people through different levels of local bodies including the *gram panchayats*. The hitherto marginalized groups have entered political life in large numbers and vernacularized its culture and language. Party membership has risen steadily, with as many as one-sixth of citizens taking part in party activities, which is higher than the global average. The level of party identification too is fairly high and constantly rising, and a large number of smaller parties have helped to bring marginalized groups into the political process. In recent years, civil society activists have been associated with the drafting of some bills such as the Right to Information and, rather half-heartedly, the Jan Lokpal Bill.¹² While all this and much else has given greater power to the people, it has not significantly succeeded in weakening that of the representatives and breaking through the closed system that they have built. Indian democracy remains heavily weighted towards its representative rather than democratic half and has yet to get the balance right.

An important historical factor complicates the principle of popular sovereignty in India. The Indian struggle for Independence was haunted by the fear that democracy would mean rule of the Hindu majority and pose a grave and permanent threat to the minorities, a view expressed by the Muslim League, the Sikh leaders, Ambedkar, and some leaders of the tribal communities. Most Hindus accepted the need to reassure

the minorities, particularly the Muslims, and agreed to different kinds of institutional mechanism. Their leaders argued that they should behave generously like 'elder brothers', granting the religious minorities not only equal but also more rights needed to allay their fears and, in general, being 'protective' of them. This is seen in the Nehru Report of 1928 and Sapru Committee Report of 1944, and became particularly pronounced in the Constituent Assembly after the Partition, which weakened the power of the Indian Muslims and increased the Congress's sense of responsibility.

The belief that the Hindus would be the ruling community in independent India and should assuage the minorities' fears informs the Constitution. The state may not interfere with the religious beliefs and practices of minorities without their consent; their cultural and educational institutions enjoy more or less complete autonomy even when funded by the state; their cultural and educational rights enjoy the status of fundamental rights; and so on. By contrast, the state is given a relatively free hand in relation to the Hindu majority, which includes defining who counts as a Hindu and what constitutes Hinduism, reforming their customs and practices, and regulating their educational institutions and temples. Since the Hindus were supposed to be in charge of the state, they were assumed to have every reason to trust it to understand their religion and culture and intervene in these only when that was in their interest.

This way of understanding the Indian state has deeply shaped the theory and practice of Indian democracy. The sensitivity to the sentiments and concerns of religious minorities has acquired enormous importance in India, far more than in most democracies, and they are in several respects treated almost like a protected species. When laws affecting them are enacted, they are drafted in consultation with their representatives and are even subject to their veto, as was the case with the Muslim Women (Protection of Right on Divorce) Act, 1986 and the Christian Marriage Act 1993. The state's treatment of Hindus and non-Hindus is not only asymmetrical but also unequal as it gives the latter negative and positive rights not available to the former. So far as the religious and cultural sphere is concerned, Indian democracy is thus almost unique in having a pro-minority bias. Its majority community has deliberately limited its powers and exempted the religious minorities from its reach.

Whether or not such an approach was well-conceived in principle or in its historical context, it has created predictable problems. Some groups of Hindus resent it as a case of minority favouritism; many others see it as an expression of their elder brotherly generosity, which is not only patronizing but expects the minorities to show their gratitude by behaving in ways acceptable to the majority. In either case, it puts the religious minorities under pressure and gives the majority a feeling of moral superiority. Furthermore, the protective provisions for the minorities create the impression that the latter are well looked after and treated favourably or at least equally. This not only detracts attention from the various ways in which they are discriminated against and their interests ignored in other spheres of life but also excuses the state from its responsibility to do something about them. Not surprisingly, the Muslims, the religiously best 'protected' minority, have long been at the bottom of the pile and are only now beginning to receive government attention.

Elections

Elections in India have been held regularly since 1952. They are free and fair, subject to few challenges, and the defeated candidates have invariably accepted their results. Opposition candidates are rarely subjected to trumped up charges before biased courts and ruined financially or imprisoned, and there are no cases of retribution against the activists of defeated parties. Elections are supervised by an independent and constitutionally established Election Commission of India, whose Model Code of Conduct is strictly enforced as soon as the elections are announced. The Commission has over the years developed several innovative measures that are unique to India. It ropes in voluntary organizations and urban and rural authorities to facilitate the registration of young and newly eligible voters, overcome their psychological barriers, and increase their electoral participation. Along with local police officers, it undertakes vulnerability mapping in each district to identify and protect voters in areas where fair and free elections might be difficult. The Commission has stood up to the government on several occasions and has rightly acquired considerable moral and political authority. On average, just under 60 per cent of the electorate votes in national elections, which is a little lower than most Western democracies, and has

remained more or less constant over the past 60 years. Unlike other democracies, the turnout is higher in state and panchayat elections, and often tends to go up, the lower one goes down the representative tiers and closer to people's daily concerns. Dalits tend to vote in larger numbers than the Brahmins and working classes more than the middle classes; since the Emergency, the turnout in rural India is higher than in the urban areas.

Elections occur at several levels such as the villages, blocks, districts, states, and the national. Indeed there is hardly a year without them taking place at some level in some parts of the country. There are 2,27,000 village councils, 5,900 block councils, 470 district councils, 27 states with over 5,000 Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), and over 500 Members of Parliament (MPs). Although block panchayats are very weak in every Indian state and dominated by bureaucrats, this is happily not the case at local and district levels. Over three million men and women at any given time hold elected offices and have an experience of managing public affairs, a phenomenon whose long-term cultural and political impact should not be underestimated. India proudly calls itself the largest democracy. At one level, this only means that it has the largest electorate, which is a purely biological phenomenon and not a collective achievement or a matter of pride. There is, however, a deeper sense in which India's pride is fully justified. No other country, past or present, has conducted its elections at so many levels so smoothly and effectively among such a huge and diverse electorate, increasing in millions at every election, and sustained its people's confidence and enthusiastic participation in them.

For several reasons, elections have come to dominate the Indian political imagination so heavily that they are often equated with democracy. Since citizen participation in political deliberation and protest, the two other avenues of political engagement, is relatively weak, the elections have become the most important vehicle of popular self-expression and connecting with political power. They also provide an effective way to pressure the government to attend to the poor and marginalized groups, which is why the latter tend to vote in larger numbers than the middle classes. Unlike in the West, elections in India are not an exclusively political phenomenon. They are occasions for unsettling the local equations of social dominance and challenging the pattern of hierarchical relations, and these have a profound social and

cultural significance. They give the voters a sense of dignity, equality, and power—a vital consideration in a hierarchical society. Voters are courted and respected in a way many of them are not in other areas of life, and the lower castes stand in the same line as and rub shoulders with the higher. The elections are also an occasion to chastise their masters which they, especially the poor and the lower castes, cannot even dream of doing in the normal course of life. The elections are not so much the 'Great Choosing Day' as Walt Whitman called them as the Day of Judgement when the supplicants of yesterday pass a verdict on their remote and arrogant superiors in a way that often takes the latter by surprise and reveals the fragility of their power. Elections in India are a national spectacle, a bonding experience, a shared exercise of collective power. Indeed they seem to have acquired a quasi-religious ethos reminiscent of Indian religious rituals. The guarded booth, its silence and unhurried pace, marking the finger with black ink as a sign of having voted, the solitary act of pressing a button, its enormous potency and unpredictable outcome, the marches and processions before and after the elections—all this embeds elections in India's traditional culture and shows how the country has made them its own.

The vernacular languages in which the vast majority of Indians think about elections give some idea of how they view or rather are expected to view them, an important point often missed by much of the English-language writing on Indian democracy. *Chunav*, the word for election, means choice exercised with care and discrimination. *Mat*, the word for vote, means opinion, a well-considered view, implying that the vote should be an expression not of an impulsive reaction but a rational judgement. *Matdan* or casting a vote is a rich and complex concept. *Dan* means a gift, a donation, giving something as a matter of duty with no expectation of reward, as in *shramadam*, *annadan*, and *gowdan*. *Matdan* in its idealized version means voting as a gift to the country, a selfless act motivated by a desire to serve or promote its interests and likely to earn one spiritual merit. Although the idealized version does not guide the vast majority of voters for whom voting is an exercise of power and a way of promoting their interests, it is not entirely absent either as some election studies have shown, and in any case, it serves to remind people of what is expected of them.¹³

The compulsions of democratic politics are transforming the caste system in several important ways. By granting equal dignity, status,

and rights to all, it challenges and weakens the caste hierarchy. Since a single caste does not generally form a majority in a constituency, castes are compelled to form alliances and forge common identities. Castes are the basis of reservations and other privileges and remain a force among the lower castes, but even here they are undergoing changes. They are used as a political tool to promote their interests but carry no deeper meaning. Castes close to each other in the hierarchy coalesce into a single caste for political purposes, even the higher and lower ones are sometimes forced to unite under a single party, and their social boundaries lose their hold. Castes are internally divided by class, gender, political, and generational differences, and are no longer as rigid as they once were. Indeed many of them are like semi-voluntary associations held together not by a shared occupation, hierarchical status, or allegiance to a common leader but by relatively fluid customs and practices that do not stand in the way of close political cooperation. While castes continue to shape the practice of Indian democracy, they are also in turn transformed by it.

While the elections have brought the large masses of Indians into the political life, given them ownership of the state, and helped integrate the country, they have not been successful in producing honest and able representatives. According to newspaper reports the Lok Sabha of 2008–9 had 124 MPs with a criminal record, including 83 who were charged with murder. In the last Parliament, 162 MPs had criminal records and 76 of them had been charged with heinous crimes ranging from murder to dacoity; in the current Lok Sabha, the corresponding figures are 187 and 113. A. Raja, Suresh Kalmadi, and Kanimozhi who were in prison for financial scandals were back in the Parliament and sat on its standing committees. In some state assemblies, the situation is even worse. In the last UP assembly, 35 per cent of the MLAs were charged with criminal cases, and in Uttarakhand and Goa, the figures were 24 per cent and 23 per cent respectively. In the 2010 Bihar Legislative Assembly, resulting from the elections widely hailed as a triumph for Nitish Kumar's clean government, 110 out of 243 members had criminal charges against them including extortion, kidnapping, and murder.

Few MPs work their way through business, professional associations, trade unions, social work, or grass-roots politics, and a large number owe their positions to familial and other connections. In this respect,

the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the parties of the Left have a better record than the Congress, which has for several decades, and more and more in recent years, surrendered itself obsequiously to a single family and in which the dynastic succession at the top is played out below. In the last Lok Sabha, two-thirds of MPs under 40 and all under 30 years of age owed their seats to family connections, as did 70 per cent of all women MPs in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.¹⁴ Their pedigree, of course, should not be held against them any more than in the medical and to a lesser extent legal professions where it is just as common, provided that it does not confer unfair advantages or become a substitute for merit. A doctor's son might inherit his father's practice, but he has to pass a professional examination and compete for survival with other doctors. That is not the case with most of these MPs who have no track record of public service; a successful local, state, or national level political career; or proven administrative talents, and owe their positions largely to family connections. The enormous and increasing role of family ties is turning politics into a family occupation, almost like a caste. It has limited the pool of available talent, covered up government misdeeds, encouraged nepotism, weakened public norms, and in these and other ways done much harm to Indian democracy.

Although family connections play a part in all political systems, their excessive dominance in India and the consequent proliferation of large and small dynasties is unique to it and a result of several factors. Family ties are quite close in India and generate a strong psychological pressure. They are also greatly valued and taken to generate strong moral obligations that one may not disregard. Trust is largely limited to the members of one's family and caste, and politicians think it safe to induct their family members into their inner circles. As for their followers, they too share the value attached to the family and see nothing wrong in the importance given to it. Indeed dynastic succession suits them well as the pattern of relations they have developed with the leader and the political capital they have accumulated is continued uninterrupted under his or her heir.

Even as the dynastic propensity limits, even distorts, Indian democracy, so does its party system. In all democracies, political parties shape the nature and basis of elections. They articulate popular grievances, reconcile conflicting interests and opinions, and offer alternative perspectives on the political issues of the day. They also educate public

opinion, mobilize people, subject each other's policies to rigorous scrutiny, and seek out and give voice to neglected groups. Political parties in India leave much to be desired on all these counts. Most of them have no cadre of workers, local branches, affiliated trade unions, youth wings, or women's organizations. Nor do they have a record of nurturing their constituencies, taking up people's grievances, and building a mass basis. Even the well-organized BJP cannot penetrate much beyond most urban centres and below the district level so that it has to rely on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) at election time. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was once a cadre-based party but later became a family enterprise. Political parties do not stand for an identifiable economic and political programme, let alone a vision of the country. They have archaic and opaque decision-making structures, with no checks on party leaders and no forums for internal debate. They are split, merged, and dissolved at the convenience of their leaders and are like business firms trading, sometimes speculatively, in political power and patronage. Hardly any political party practises or values internal democracy even in its elementary forms of elected leadership and tolerance of disagreement. Their authoritarian structures and ethos reflect and reinforce a weak democratic sensibility, which is then carried over into the wider political process.

Lacking the usual basis of dependable electoral support such as a shared ideology, public trust, and the loyalty built up over time, political parties tend to rely on caste and religious affiliations, the charisma of their leaders, and money to win elections. Choosing an influential caste or religious leader or a caste- or religion-specific grievance or policy often secures the support of a sizeable section of the electorate that is sometimes enough to win in a multiparty contest and spares the painstaking effort of cultivating broad-based support.

The influence of money is not at all unique to India, but its form is. It is used to bribe voters, brokers of vote banks, or muscle men, and is deployed in cash or in kind. It is used to influence journalists and media coverage and to fund paid news. It finances candidates put up to split the rival's vote, and to collect intelligence on his campaign strategy and supporters. It is also used to purchase the loyalty of middle-level leaders of opposition parties in the months before the election when the strong anti-defection law loses much of its force. All this favours rich candidates who are able to find the sum of around six crore rupees that

a parliamentary election is believed to require. It is striking that nearly 20 per cent of the MPs in the last Lok Sabha were dollar millionaires, and their number among the MLAs in several states is even higher and constantly rising. They obviously want to recover their investment and find all too familiar ways of doing so.¹⁵

Entering politics is the most profitable investment, and the growth in the assets of politicians, including even the humblest representatives, is faster than that of most businesses. Since politics brings money and the power to influence government policies and escape the ordinary processes of law, it tends to attract shady characters including convicted criminals.¹⁶ They are not barred from contesting elections and sitting in the Parliament as long as their appeal is pending, and that in India can take several years and even decades. They have powerful political contacts, which help in getting nominations and access to large sums of money, and often belong to regionally dominant castes. *Prima facie*, it is puzzling why people vote for them. Voters are not all venal or undiscerning and are known to favour clean candidates over their corrupt rivals. Sometimes many of them abstain, allowing the latter to get in. On other occasions, clean candidates have no track record of serving the community, appear distant and high-minded, do not know the local officials or rules of the game well enough to get the voter's work done, are unable to protect their constituents from dangerous elements, or the voter cannot be sure that they would remain clean once elected. Since the political system does not command the voters' trust, they think, often rightly, that their best bet is to put in people with the proven capacity to manipulate it, particularly as they themselves might sometime want things done out of turn.

Although Indian elections are free and procedurally fair, they suffer from several limitations. They do not provide level playing fields as the choice of candidates is rigged in favour of those with family connections. If we add to this the advantages conferred by wealth and caste, the field for competition is closed to most hopefuls. Furthermore, most candidates, although increasingly drawn from different social classes, are products of the same political culture. Irrespective of their parties, they share a common attitude to political power and similar habits of thought and behaviour. Most of them spring from the world of politics, live by and for politics, and constitute a recognizable and self-perpetuating political class.

Elections require choices between parties and programmes, and the latter cover an extremely narrow range in India. The Left is largely limited to the communists whose power base is localized and dwindling. Socialists have all but ceased to exist in much of India, and are limited to UP and Bihar where the socialist parties wrongly so-called are casteist and survive on caste votes. The Congress and the BJP, the only two truly national parties, have no distinct and identifiable visions of India or well-thought out comprehensive programmes for action. The economy is a qualified exception, but even here the otherwise welcome policy of liberalization was a response to a financial crisis and foreign pressure rather than the product of a rational national debate. Lacking a national consensus and commitment, its introduction has been hesitant, ad hoc, selective, in uncoordinated phases, and without much thought to its long-term social, political, and even economic consequences. In this respect, there is not much difference between the Congress and the BJP, except that the former, although equally committed to corporate interests, is more sensitive to pro-poor welfare provisions. After Independence, the Congress had the choice and the opportunity to become a social democratic party, but it was too eclectic, lacking in organizational discipline, and close to dominant interests to do so. The BJP had the possibility of becoming the Indian equivalent of the European Christian democratic parties, a party of all Indians (*janatā*), cherishing worthwhile Indian values and sensibilities (*Bharatiya*) and taking a form suited to the country's traditions (*parivar* rather than a *paksha* or party). Instead it became a culturally shallow, politically intolerant, and narrowly Hindu party.

When the Indian voter chooses a national party, he is not sure what principles divide the Congress and the BJP. Secularism is often presented as the decisive difference, so much so that if a party is secular, all its sins are forgiven, and if it is not, all its virtues are forgotten. The Congress thinks it can continue to win elections or secure coalition partners by making the BJP a political pariah. The BJP plays the same game by accusing the Congress of pseudo-secularism and appropriating 'true' secularism for itself. The ensuing debate trivializes secularism and oversimplifies the issues involved. Several articles of the Indian Constitution ban discrimination against and enjoin protection of religious minorities, and the Supreme Court has declared secularism to be its essential feature. No party, including the BJP, can therefore afford

to be other than secular without falling foul of the Constitution. The debate on secularism thus loses much of its point and sometimes even becomes a form of political blackmail. The Congress has treated the Muslims as a vote bank, exploited their fear of the Hindu communalists, and periodically thrown them a few crumbs of comfort, but it has done little to address their long-standing problems. For its part, the BJP has traded in fomenting suspicion of them and treated the Hindus as a vote bank. This is not to deny that the differences between the two parties are important and matter in times of crisis but rather to say that neither party rises above communal consciousness, be it benign or malign; sees Muslims and other minorities as fellow citizens to be treated exactly like the rest; and seeks to integrate them into the national mainstream.

Elections have served the Indian democracy well but not as well as they could and should have. They have given dignity and equality to individuals, empowered them, and enabled them to humble, humiliate, and get rid of governments they disapprove of. They have brought marginalized groups in the mainstream of political life, encouraged them to organize and form alliances with others, given them the hope that they can improve their prospects, and contained secessionist movements by giving them a stake in the unity and stability of the Indian state. Elections have bound the country together in a common national conversation, fostered tolerance of differences, been a source of national self-confidence and pride, and given the country international recognition. They have taught Indians to be sceptical of false promises, empty slogans, emotional appeals, religious propaganda, and the meretricious charm of charismatic leaders, and in these and other ways, contributed to their political maturity and sophistication.

While all this is most welcome, elections have failed to realize their full democratic potential. They have not given the people a meaningful choice between different visions of the country and helped them put persons of integrity and wisdom in power. In the absence of serious debates, elections have done little to increase the average Indian's understanding of the long-term problems facing the country; the nexus between the government, the media, and the corporate interests; and the range of possibilities open to the country. They have not countered effectively the influence of corporate interests and generated an alternative source of political power. While elections have given the people

the power to change their rulers, the realization that the new lot is often no better than the old has bred some degree of disillusionment and despair, and generated a desire for an authoritarian rule disguised as a demand for a 'strong' leader.

Political Deliberation

The birth of Indian democracy set an excellent example of political deliberation. Freely drawing on the ideas and experiences of other countries, members of the Constituent Assembly—who between them represented a fairly wide range of India's social, religious, and ideological diversity—debated and reached a consensus on the constitutional design of the new state. Although they personally or their political parties held certain views on important matters, they were open minded enough to revise them when shown to be mistaken or divisive. This was reflected in the fact that as many as 7,500 amendments to the draft Constitution were tabled, of which 2,500 were moved and nearly a fifth accepted.

Post-Independence parliaments carried on this great tradition and witnessed high-quality debates on several large issues such as the Hindu Code Bills, the mixed economy, and foreign policy. By and large, most MPs were men and women of considerable political experience and talent and had an independent power base. Many of them were products of the independence struggle and had entered politics for idealistic reasons. Some belonged to no party and freely expressed their views. Political parties allowed internal debates and knew what they stood for. Sometimes their members shared more in common with other political parties than with their fellow members, which made party divisions relatively porous and encouraged an open-minded dialogue. Good speeches in the Parliament were widely appreciated including by the prime minister himself who would sometimes send congratulatory notes to the speakers. The Parliament became a forum where talented young men and women sought to make their mark and hoped to be rewarded with appropriate offices. Nehru attended the Parliament regularly, first made important announcements to it, sought to persuade its members, and sometimes changed his views in response to their criticisms.

During the past few decades, the quality of deliberation in the Parliament and state assemblies has suffered a dramatic decline. The

Parliament met on average for 124 days a year between 1952 and 1961, declining to 81 days between 1992 and 2001, and to 50 and 64 days respectively in 2008 and 2009. The Winter Session in 2010 was almost completely wiped out because of the Opposition boycott, and the Lok Sabha met for only eight hours as opposed to the planned 144. During the monsoon session of 2012, the Parliament met for only a quarter of the scheduled time. There is hardly a year without frequent interruptions, many of them pointless or provoked by an intransigent government, leading sometimes to the suspension of the day's proceedings and costing the country Rs 25 crore for a day's disruption.¹⁷ As a result, Bills of momentous importance are sometimes inordinately delayed or passed without careful scrutiny or even a debate. The Lok Sabha passed eight Bills in as little as 17 minutes in 2009. In 2010, only 13 per cent of the bills took up more than three hours of debate, 11 per cent were debated for less than an hour, and 20 per cent for less than five minutes. It is striking too that something as important as the Five Year Plan has rarely been a subject of proper debate and that many public-private partnerships, which take up vast public resources, are not subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

The situation at the state level is even more depressing. Between 2000 and 2010, state assemblies met on average for 42 days a year in Maharashtra, 31 days in Gujarat, 26 days in Assam, 14 in Haryana, and the derisory 8 days in Arunachal Pradesh. The 2010 Winter Session in UP lasted as little as 20 minutes. Very few Bills in state assemblies are scrutinized by committees. Between 2007 and 2010, none of the 70 odd Bills introduced in the Bihar and Pondicherry assemblies was subjected to scrutiny. Even in West Bengal, which had a better record than most states, only 15 out of 252 Bills were scrutinized between 2002 and 2008. In the Haryana assembly, there has been no discussion on any Bill during the past decade, and they were all passed on the same day that they were introduced! In Bihar and West Bengal, 96 per cent and 91 per cent of the Bills respectively were introduced and passed on the same day.

The Parliament has several standing committees that oversee particular departments (such as those on home affairs and health) or functions (such as those on public accounts and estimates) as well as ad hoc committees appointed for specific purposes. Some of them transcend party divisions, invite experts and civil society organizations to

depose before them, and consider the subject in a detailed and impartial manner. This was the case with the committee dealing with the Act relating to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employee Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The strong draft Bill that went from Sonia Gandhi's National Advisory Council was emasculated by the relevant ministries, but the parliamentary committee that heard arguments from Aruna Roy, Jean Drèze, and others restored the original Bill. Other committees sadly leave much to be desired, such as those on agriculture, rural development, and human resources. Since departmentally related standing committees are reconstituted every year, their members do not build the necessary expertise. Some committees either have too many ministries under them and cannot do them justice or lack adequate research staff, receive inadequate information from the government, and are easily guided by civil servants. The government does not even have to give reasons for rejecting the recommendations of the standing committees. The one on the Educational Tribunal Bill made several valuable recommendations that were all ignored. Ad hoc committees are at the mercy of their chairmen who decide how often to meet. One on the important Right to Education met only twice, and many in the Parliament and the country rightly felt that it did not give the subject the deliberative scrutiny it deserved. The Parliament, if it wants, can easily get to the bottom of many corruption-related issues. Yet not one selected committee, whether it is on 2G pricing, coal blocks, natural gas pricing, or civil aviation, has done a minimally decent job, not even ascertaining which minister knew what.

While some MPs are outstanding and bring a high level of intelligence and expertise to the debate, others leave much to be desired, particularly those selected for their caste, money, muscle power, or family connections. Many of them hardly contribute to the debates; as many a third of them never spoke during the life of the Parliament in 2010. Many of those who speak do little more than repeat the party line, partly because the party is their only source of information and opinion, and partly because divergence from it could signify defection and invite disqualification. Since few MPs are ideologically committed to a programme that they are keen to push through Parliament and their parliamentary performance does not attract much ministerial or national attention, they have little incentive to work hard and make a mark. Contrary to what is a common practice in other democracies,

two of the principal decision-makers in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, the prime minister and Sonia Gandhi, rarely spoke in the Parliament or participated in the cut and thrust of the debate. They did not generally speak to the media either, let alone being cross-examined by them, and did not build informed public opinion on major policy issues, with the result that even the otherwise well-considered policies were unnecessarily politicized and sometimes dropped in the face of misguided popular agitation. In this respect the newly elected Modi government shows little improvement.

On many important issues, decisions are taken by the government without wider consultation or even a debate in the Parliament. To take a recent example under the last UPA government, the important Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement with the European Union (EU) involved a range of policy decisions about tariffs; giving greater access to banking, retail trade, telecommunications, and legal and accounting services; and providing the highest possible level of legal protection and certainty to European investors. These rounds of negotiations were conducted without consulting small and medium enterprises, farmers' groups, trade unions, and community-based organizations. While the agreement was debated in and ratified by the national parliaments in all 27 EU members, it was not debated in, let alone ratified, by the Indian Parliament. This is not at all say to that the government did not give much thought to the details of the negotiations and the resulting agreement but rather that they were not extensively debated in the country and subjected to parliamentary scrutiny.

The scandal over the government's sale of millions of dollars' worth of cell-phone spectrum to politically influential companies is another example.¹⁸ The magnitude of the deal was shocking. Even more disturbing was the fact that the government did not think it necessary to explain the comparative merits of different ways of disposing of public resources and why it chose not to auction the licenses. The Indian higher education is poor by international standards, and not one of its universities comes among the top 200 in the world compared to two in Hong Kong and four in China. Yet it has never been a subject of sustained and agonized debate in the Parliament.

In every democracy, the media plays a crucial role in shaping the quality and content of political deliberation. In India, it presents a mixed picture. It has several excellent periodicals and political

magazines, and it makes thoughtful contributions to public debates. The same cannot be said of many of the country's newspapers and visual media. While some do a marvellous job, others leave much to be desired. Although a few have courageously exposed and mounted campaigns against rampant corruption, government incompetence, misuse of power, ill treatment of minorities and ugly social practices, their role in providing balanced and carefully researched information, analysing important issues, and encouraging thoughtful debates remains rather limited. Some newspapers have excellent columnists and even invite distinguished academics and experts to write for them, but they are few in number and the standards of even the better ones have declined in recent years. They reproduce articles from the foreign, mainly the Anglo-American, press that often have little relevance to India, and allocate only a limited space to readers' letters, major parliamentary debates, and news about the comparable experiences and problems of other countries. India has some fine think tanks that produce valuable background material on current issues, but it often remains limited to the cognoscenti and does not find its way into either the popular media or legislative deliberation.

A sizeable section of Indian media takes great care not to stretch the intellectual or even the linguistic ability of their audiences. Serious problems facing the country are ignored or glossed over; deep differences of views are simplified and explained away as struggles between personalities; and complex matters of policy are reduced to shallow slogans. Since the lifestyles of celebrities sell and reassure, they receive extensive coverage, whereas the struggles and tragedies of millions are ignored or sanitized. Less than 10 per cent of media attention is given to rural India where 70 per cent of Indians live. Farmers' suicides numbering thousands have received far less coverage than the Fashion Week. Government subsidies to the poor are given prominence and pilloried, whereas those to the middle classes and business are not even mentioned. A distinguished and sympathetic foreign journalist recently commented, no doubt with some exaggeration, that it took him less than 15 minutes to run through five or six major Indian national dailies. They were repetitive, complacent, full of trivia, often relied on formal press releases and the internet rather than personal investigations by their correspondents, and contained little that required reflection. The journalist thought that India had

become so complacent and self-satisfied that the quality of its public debate, lacking depth and anguish, was sometimes no better than that in Pakistan or Bangladesh. Thanks to India's long and rich tradition of public debate, serious policy issues do get discussed, but these discussions remain episodic, marginal, and reach only a small section. In this respect, the regional media sometimes does a better job. It is more probing, expresses a wider range of views, and is closer to popular concerns, but it has less influence on the national elite and is more vulnerable to corporate manipulation and government pressure than its national counterparts.

Several factors are responsible for this. As in much of the rest of the world, corporate interests control most of the Indian media. Since there are no regulations on cross-media ownership, monopolies and cartels dominate the print and electronic media, and the line between the media and big business is getting increasingly blurred. The Reliance Industries Ltd owns seven television channels. And *Dainik Bhaskar*, a major daily newspaper with 17.5 million readers in 13 states and published in four languages, owns 69 companies with interests in mining, power generation, real estates, and textiles. It is hardly surprising that proprietors use their newspapers and television channels to influence government policies in relevant sectors and the media coverage of their business affairs. Journalists are sometimes close to corporate interests and under pressure not to expose their scams and scandals or to ask probing questions about their affairs. The earlier tradition of editorial independence and arm's-length relationship with the management has been heavily compromised under commercial pressure. In the absence of well-organized and adequately resourced groups monitoring the media and exposing its complicity with politicians and big business, the situation continues unchallenged.

Youth forms a major media constituency and determines its circulation and viewing figures upon which its advertisements and profits depend.¹⁹ Given the poor quality of education of many young people, their lack of interest in large issues and low attention span, even the otherwise serious media tends to dumb down its coverage and concentrate on the trivia to capture and retain the youth market. The attention of the youth can only be held by making politics entertaining, and that leads to the triple strategy of simplification, personalization, and confrontational presentation of serious issues. If India is not care-

ful, its so-called demographic dividend has the potential to become a political and cultural liability.

Television in India is often raw, aggressively competitive, and expanding at an incredible rate, and the country has not yet had the time to absorb its presence and build appropriate defences against it. Its serious discussions are expected to be gripping, entertaining, undemanding, capable of being followed while one is doing something else, and not different from the soap operas, the drama, and the advertisements between which they are squeezed in. Since far more people have access to television than they do to the print media, the former has a far greater impact on the tone and level of public discourse. While it must obviously reflect what people want, it can also do much to shape what they want by tapping into the idealism of the youth and providing an intellectually and morally serious discussion of important issues. That requires courage, willingness to take risks, and a sense of public responsibility, and these have not always been forthcoming. Some channels do promote excellent discussions and debates, but they are rather few and often lack consistency.

The social background of those occupying the upper echelons of the media is also a source of concern. Not one of the 315 editors and senior management of the print and electronic media in Delhi belongs to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Scheduled Tribes (STs). Ninety per cent of them belong to upper castes which form only 16 per cent of the population. This is also broadly the case with the columnists and commentators. Such a gross social imbalance distorts the media's moral and political sensibility, and its coverage and prioritization of issues. The media and its intended audiences share a broad consensus on what India should be like, talk the same language, and seek to reassure each other. As a result, dissenting voices and oppressed groups get ignored or marginalized and fail to receive the attention they deserve.

When the range of views shrinks drastically and public deliberation tends to lack depth, large issues such as those relating to the country's moral and political culture, the health of its democracy, decline of its major institutions, social cohesion, quality of education, path of development, and poverty receive only a perfunctory treatment. Organized interests within and outside India with a clear ideological line to propagate and the resources to do so fill the resulting intellectual vacuum. Neither subjected to a rigorous critique nor confronted with

a coherent alternative, their views acquire a hegemonic influence and blot out other perspectives. Such an insidious seduction of the Indian mind not only gives the country a false view of itself but also weakens its capacity for critical public deliberation so necessary for the vitality of its democracy.

Respect for Institutional Norms

A political community is articulated at two interdependent but basically separate levels, the state and the government, each subject to appropriate ethical norms. Representing the collective dimension of society, the state is expected to stand above its divisions, and pursue its interest in a neutral and non-partisan manner. Its institutions such as the civil service, the armed forces, the security services, the investigative and monitoring agencies, and the judiciary are all professional bodies standing above the normal political life, and governed by clearly stated rules, procedures, and norms. Those running them are expected to display such virtues as impartiality, fidelity to rules, respect for law, procedural propriety, confidentiality, and institutional discipline.

The elected government is concerned with the conduct of public affairs and is, unlike the state, embedded in and forms the centre of political life. Although it is partisan and committed to the programme on which it is elected, it is subject to two fundamental constraints. It should respect the independence of the institutions of the state and not use them for partisan purposes or 'politicize' their composition and mode of operation. And it should not equate the ruling party with the government, treat the latter as its mere extension, and use government's resources and powers of appointment to promote the party. As occupants of public offices, government ministers are expected to act as public persons taking decisions they can show to be in public interest. They should be honest, impartial, and competent, owing their loyalty to the country whose affairs are in their care and not swayed by narrow familial, communal, ethnic, and other publicly irrelevant considerations.

Public morality or moral norms governing the conduct of public offices presupposes a particular kind of moral and political culture. It requires that distinctions are drawn and observed between private and public, between the state and the government, between the government and the ruling party, between oneself as a private individual and the

occupant of a public office, and between one's personal ties with and obligations to particular individuals or groups and one's duty to treat all affected by one's actions equally and impartially. Moral norms further apply to all falling within their ambit irrespective of their status and power. They presuppose a minimally egalitarian culture in which all relevant claims receive equal consideration, and no individual is so privileged as to enjoy exemption from norms governing others. These and other preconditions of institutional morality are inadequately developed in India, and as a result, moral norms are not only weakly enforced but often not even acknowledged.

Thanks, among other things, to India's centuries-old caste system, Indian self-consciousness is informed by a deep sense of hierarchy. As Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar remark with only slight exaggeration, 'Irrespective of his educational status and more than in any other culture in the world, an Indian is *homo hierarchicus*'.²⁰ Individuals judge their self-worth and define their self-respect in terms of their place in the social hierarchy. One is nobody unless one is somebody, and one is somebody only if one is above someone. Even the erstwhile untouchables have an internal hierarchy and their own untouchables! This is also evident in the way individuals are often introduced to strangers, content not just to say who they are but listing their attainments and status. And the calling cards often list almost all their bearers' degrees and past and present official positions lest anyone should inadvertently forget to respect the demands of their status.

In a hierarchical society, one lords over those below and debases oneself before those above.²¹ Even as one expects one's inferiors to acknowledge their inferiority in countless subtle and crude ways, one acknowledges one's own in relation to one's superiors. As in other hierarchical societies and perhaps even more, status difference in India infects one's very humanity and extends to all areas of life including the public realm. Those of inferior status may not sit when their superiors are standing, should render them appropriate personal services, dare not disagree with them, or expect to be governed by the same rules and norms. Not surprisingly, individuals cannot take even their basic dignity and self-respect for granted unless these are underpinned by an appropriate social status.

The idea of basic human equality is not at all unfamiliar to India. Throughout its history, it has thrown up powerful egalitarian

movements, but these remained marginal, set up small egalitarian groups outside the mainstream society, or affirmed equality at the abstract spiritual level without translating it in social terms. The decisive change came with the arrival of modernity, which led to considerable moral and social churning and culminated in India's full-blooded democracy at Independence. Although equality has generated its own momentum and is leading to changes in several areas of life, it faces considerable resistance from the traditional ways of thought and life, and remains largely confined to the legal and political spheres. It has neither significantly changed the structure and quality of normal social relations between individuals and social groups nor undermined or even significantly weakened the obsession with status.²² The assertion of equality by subordinate groups sometimes takes the form of defiance and symbolic humiliation of their erstwhile superiors, but that only reveals their internalized sense of inferiority. They use the language of equality to push their claims against their superiors but resist the similar demands of those below them. This ideological incoherence generates bad faith and makes it difficult to unite around the shared vision of a minimally egalitarian society.

The hierarchical view of life remains so deep that as the caste hierarchy, and even the caste consciousness, is weakening, wealth and political power are becoming the bases of a new system of hierarchy. Unlike the caste-based superiority, which is ascriptive and cannot be taken away, that based on wealth and political power is fragile and can be lost when fortunes turn. Not surprisingly, it breeds deep anxiety and insecurity and leads to an intensely aggressive and desperate concern not only to hold on to such wealth or power as one has but also to keep adding to it.

Wealth and political power are sources of inequality in all societies. In India, they are also sources of status or overall superiority, with the result that the ensuing inequality takes a particularly ugly form. Since wealth and political power are supposed to mark one out as a superior person, that superiority seeks recognition from others and expresses itself in ordinary forms of behaviour. Wealth is not just quietly enjoyed but flaunted so as to make the owner's superiority blatantly evident to all, and used to demand and secure exemption from norms that bind others. Political power takes even uglier forms. Those in power surround themselves by a crowd of hangers-on, and the greater their

official status, the greater is their retinue. They demand and generally get police escorts and security guards even when they do not need them because their purpose is not so much to protect them as to express and proclaim their superior status. When the UPA government tried some years ago to scale down the highly expensive system of armed protection for those who in its careful assessment did not need one, the storm of protest and the degree of moral and political blackmail by its beneficiaries forced it to climb down.

Since power or office is supposed to entitle one to a special status, it is expected to secure exemption from the rules and norms governing others.²³ A security officer at an airport or a public function daring to ask a superior-looking person for his invitation or security pass is sure to invite a rebuke for his impertinence and even perhaps lose his job. Air India, a national carrier is supposed to 'belong' to the government whose ministers may therefore use it as they please. When travelling abroad with their usually large retinues, the most senior among them sometimes demand seats at a very short notice, and legitimate passengers get off-loaded. Ministers turn up late for the flight, which then gets delayed, sometimes by hours. When ministers visit places, roads are supposed to belong to them and closed off to normal traffic. The more high ranking a minister, the greater is the inconvenience to the public. These inconveniences can be easily avoided as they are in the West by requiring those in power to accept the same discipline and rules as the rest with such minor adjustments as are necessary. However, that kind of equal treatment is precisely what the 'superior' people find threatening to their status and cannot accept.²⁴

The sense of hierarchy damages Indian political life at many levels. In every organization including political parties and government departments, information and decision-making are centralized. This is common to many countries, but in India it serves the additional function of defining and demarcating status. Invidious distinctions of status are made at all levels; much energy is spent undercutting each other because of status competition; and the quest for domination trumps the need to address common problems in a cooperative spirit. Those lower down are afraid to take decisions lest they should make mistakes or wrongly second-guess their superior's intentions, and little gets done without guidance from above. The organization is personalized; belongs to those at the top; and others do not identify with it, see it as theirs,

or build a sense of collective solidarity. This discourages collaborative or team work and hinders institution building. Those at the top are not receptive to criticism and those at the bottom to making it. If the former are criticized, they tend to construe it as a challenge and even a slight. Losing an argument is sometimes equated with losing status and hence as a form of humiliation. This inhibits free and rigorous discussion and a critical feedback, and tends to result in hasty and poorly thought-out decisions for which no one accepts responsibility or is held accountable. A.D. Gorwala, a senior and upright officer, describes his encounter in the late 1950s with the chief minister of Bombay when he was a supply commissioner responsible for controlling the prices of essential goods, and deserves to be quoted in full.²⁵

We had controlled the price of sugar, but the price of gur or molasses rose; and so we controlled the price of gur also, to bring about parity between the two. The Chief Minister didn't like that at all; and he ordered, without even seeing the papers, that gur should be decontrolled. When the order came down to me, I re-submitted the whole case, saying: 'It seems that the facts of the case have not come to your notice'.

The Chief Minister was very annoyed, and he sent for me and berated me. He said: 'You are my subordinate, and you dare to send back something on which I have passed orders?' I said: 'Sir, you didn't really know the facts when you passed the orders—you hadn't seen the papers—so I was duty-bound to re-submit the case to you. If you now decide, after considering all this, that you still want to de-control, of course your orders will be carried out. But it is my duty to give you the best advice on the subject possible.' He said: 'You are my servant. You have no business to say this, that or the other to me, only to carry out my orders.' I replied: 'Look, sir, there is a fallacy here. I am not your servant, nor is anyone else in government any particular person's servant; he is a public servant. You are an elected public servant; I am an appointed public servant; but we are both servants. And the whole position of the Permanent Secretary is to be your expert adviser.' 'So you think I will now accept your views?' he asked. 'Yes, sir,' I said, 'I should think so.' 'Well,' he said, 'just to spite you, I won't, so you can see that my orders must be carried out.' I said: 'Please yourself, sir'; and I muttered to myself as I left the Gujarati saying: 'What can good sense do before power?'

Soon after this incident, Gorwala resigned.

Although things have improved since then, his experience remains fairly common as several civil servants have testified in their memoirs

or interviews. As N.N. Vora, a former Home and Defence Secretary, put it a few years ago,

Successive State Chief Ministers, even the better among them, have been running the administrative apparatus through patronage, rewarding pliant officers through attractive postings and unmerited promotion for services rendered. The officers courageous enough to uphold rules against ministerial arbitrariness, to offer inconvenient but impartial and honest advice, or refuse to do what they consider wrong are transferred to remote areas, marginalised, reprimanded and even given a rude public dressing down.²⁶

Such an attitude to power characterizes the relations between chief ministers and their colleagues as well. Jayalalitha communicated with her ministers through one female aide and a few police officers. When he was chief minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi's ministers sometimes learnt about government policies including those relating to their own departments from newspapers. Naveen Patnaik governs in splendid isolation, brooks no disagreement, and his ministers often discover their policies when their secretaries pass them the news from the chief minister's office. Like other chief ministers, he keeps them under control by capriciously dropping a couple every few months or through periodic cabinet reshuffles. Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mayawati, and Mamata Banerjee were or are no different. With some exceptions, this was more or less true of the central government as well until the arrival of Manmohan Singh when not the prime minister but Sonia Gandhi exercised this degree of dominance.

Although respectful of his colleagues, Nehru rarely treated them as equals or even fully trusted them, and often took important decisions without much cabinet discussion or consultation. His successors personalized political power even further. The cabinet was not consulted about the imposition of Emergency, the decision to withhold the Thakkar Commission Report on the assassination of Mrs Gandhi, introduction of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill 1986, and several other important measures. Concentration of power in the hands of the prime minister has transferred it from the cabinet secretariat to the Prime Minister's Office and further weakened the institution of the cabinet. Since chief ministers and the prime minister find it difficult to accept their colleagues as equals and share power with them, few of them build a team with its free and uninhibited exchange of ideas and collective decision-making.

In India, there is another factor that militates against the emergence of an autonomous public sphere governed by its own appropriate norms. In the traditional Indian view, individuals are embedded in a web of social relations, principally the caste, the extended kinship network, and above all the family. The latter two define their social world and form the basis of their lives. Not surprisingly, much of their social morality centres on these relations, and the obligations and norms involved are clearly specified, socially enforced, and often internalized. By contrast, the world beyond these relations consists of 'outsiders' whom one approaches in largely instrumental terms. The moral norms governing it are vague, thin, without strong social sanctions, poorly internalized, violated with ease, and leave considerable room for uncertainty and distrust. Since this is where the public sphere is located, public morality including the basic norms of civil and political life remains relatively weak in India.

Occupants of public office are subject to the constant pressure of kinship-based demands. Since trust and moral bonds are largely limited to one's family and kinsmen, the latter are and expect to be favoured over others. Distant relations and caste members approach with requests for jobs, promotion, government funds, licenses, and favours, and appeal to the ethics of kinship and caste loyalty. Some, even most, of those in power share this ethics and let it override the duty of impartiality required by their office. Even someone of the stature of C. Rajagopalachari seemed to lend his authority to it when he said that the family and jati generated 'obligations of mutual help', which it was wrong to dismiss as 'nepotism' on the basis of the 'modern notion of administrative purity'. Although he disapproved of nepotism, he thought that kinship and caste-based obligations should be respected when not in blatant conflict with the demands of public office.²⁷

Those who insist on the probity of public life and dismiss kinship-based appeals are seen as sticklers for rules, rigid, unduly fastidious, uncaring, and lacking a commitment to their family and relations, and are made to pay a heavy price. Their disappointed caste members might loosen and even sever their ties with them, and deny their offspring marriage partners. Their family and kinsmen might become cold, sulk, and refuse to help in difficult times. One needs to be a moral hero to resist such pressures, and not all public figures and officials can or should be expected to be one. One cannot rely on professional

conscience alone to ensure observance of public norms; it needs the support of the wider public culture as well.

No common life is possible without trust, especially one as complex, large, and impersonal as the political community. If people think that some of them may freely exempt themselves from the rules and laws that bind the rest, they wonder why they should not do the same. Trust develops when people feel confident that others too will observe the relevant norms and that those transgressing them will be subjected to appropriate sanctions. In India, both these conditions generally obtain within the family and the caste, and hence there is considerable trust among their members. People make great sacrifices for each other in the confident expectation that these will be reciprocated, and make informal and undocumented loans of huge sums of money in the firm knowledge that these will be repaid.

The preconditions of trust are, however, poorly developed outside the kinship network, and as a result, there is much distrust and even cynicism in Indian public life. Norms of public morality are not widely internalized and woven into the individual's sense of self-worth and self-respect. Since the individual's moral sense is weak, social disapproval, sanctions, and pressure have an important role to play. But they do not because the moral culture of society is itself at best ambivalent and at worst indulgent towards violations of public norms.²⁸ In this situation, the state can do much to develop such a public culture by laying down appropriate norms of public life, naming and shaming those who violate them, honouring those who exemplify them to the highest degree, and visiting their transgressions with the full rigor of the law. Since those running it are themselves morally compromised or politically timid, the state has not discharged this task as effectively as it should have.²⁹

Leaders of independent India were acutely aware of the problem and frequently criticized their countrymen for their weak public morality. Drawing on the inspiring examples of the Indian tradition of *rajdharma* and the Western norms of public morality, they laid down high standards of public life, sometimes even higher than the best in the West, and set excellent examples. Their task was made easier by the moral idealism of the Independence movement, the determination of the Indian people to make a new historical start, the social homogeneity of the political class, and its relative insulation from the pressures of

caste and kinship networks. Even then, there were several high profile violations of public norms, not all of which were dealt with as effectively as they should have been.

As the older generation disappeared or failed to keep up the momentum and the democratic process brought in new social groups with their urgent economic concerns, history of oppression, and lack of political experience, public life began to lose its coherence. Being used to the family and caste-based morality, the new groups projected it on to the public life. Many of them were also rightly bitter about the way they had been treated in the past and felt that since the upper castes had traditionally used the institutions of the state to promote their interests, it was now their turn to do so. They saw regulative procedures and rules as devices to curb their newly acquired power and felt free to disregard them. They relied on the readily available solidarity of the caste to mobilize their followers politically, and that too reinforced the caste-based morality. Afraid of losing their hold on the state, the upper castes and the vested interests did the same and ignored institutional norms when these stood in their way.

As a result of all this, several institutions of the state are in a state of decay. The Election Commission, the Supreme Court, the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) Office, and the Intelligence Bureau are some of the obvious exceptions, but even they have been tainted in recent years. They have been used to serve the government's political agenda or to promote its interests in disregard of moral norms, and punishment does not generally follow as the investigating and enforcement agencies themselves are subject to similar misuse. In spite of widespread criticism, criminals continue to be elected to the Parliament and state legislatures. When the Supreme Court disallowed the election of tainted candidates a couple of years ago, the political parties led by the Congress combined to override it without the slightest unease. When the public outcry was unmistakable and threatened the Congress party's electoral chances, Rahul Gandhi, whose mother and evidently he himself had been willing parties to the decision, disowned it and demanded its reversal. The government dutifully complied after only a few minutes of discussion at a hastily convened cabinet meeting, without pausing to wonder what the rest of the country was likely to think of the integrity and political judgement of ministers who changed their minds so drastically so soon, and why anyone should respect its

decisions in future when they could be reversed under pressure. This miserable incident is as good an example as any of the spirit of cynicism informing the Indian political system, and the reason why public trust in political leaders and institutions is extremely low. When someone of Dr Manmohan Singh's personal honesty was prime minister, he was not only forgiven his lack of political and administrative skills but also used to deflect attention from and even legitimize the corrupt system over which he presided and which he did little to change.

The general lack of trust means that few believe a word of what most politicians say. This is of course a universal phenomenon, but it has reached disturbing proportions in India. Most politicians say things they do not believe; indeed many of them do not believe in anything, and such convictions as they claim to hold are fluid and negotiable. Promises given by political parties and governments are frequently broken and rarely trusted. When political speech gets devalued to this degree, the very lifeblood of democracy is drained away. The general lack of trust goes further and extends to the major institutions of the state itself. Many civil servants are believed to be in league with and ready to bend the rules to oblige their political masters, outside interests, or both. Few Indians expect them to take decisions on grounds of national interest and judge their cases on merit. Transactions with bureaucrats, high as well as lowly, are often a matter of negotiation or bargain, successful only if one has the right connection or offers the right price. Driven by pique, personal interest, or vendetta, some of the most highly placed officials have seen nothing wrong in violating the most basic professional norms and even damaging the national interest. When General V.K. Singh recently revealed out of pique that the Indian army had funded non-governmental organizations and several ministries in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, it did not worry him that he had damaged the army, broken its discipline, and harmed the democratic process in Kashmir.

Poverty and Inequality

Acute and widespread poverty has shadowed Indian democracy from its birth and received little serious attention. Nehru talked about it from time to time but did little. Indira Gandhi's *Garibi Hatao*, the first time an Indian Prime Minister made removal of poverty a major plank

in his or her election campaign, paradoxically both stressed its seriousness and trivialized it by reducing it to a mere slogan. In the early years of Independence, poverty could be blamed on the colonial rule, the slow growth rate, and an inadequate understanding of its causes and remedies. This has not been the case for the past three decades. We have a better understanding of how to deal with poverty. Democracy has empowered the poor. India has chalked up a fairly high growth rate over a period of several years, reaching nearly eight per cent in some and around five per cent in recent years. Its public revenue today is four times as much as in 1990 and, being derived from diverse sources, is not dependent on any one of them. The fruits of growth, however, are not equitably shared, and poverty remains a major problem.

Since poverty is a normative concept, its criteria are subject to dispute. The government defines it in minimalist terms, virtually equating it with bare survival, both to reduce its own fiscal outlay and to support its claim that its economic reforms are working. Even that puts the number of poor at around 25 per cent, which amounts to over 250 million people. Other less biased and more realistic estimates put it at between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of the population. If poverty is defined multidimensionally, as it should be and is done by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to include child mortality, malnutrition, and access to drinking water and toilet facilities, 53.9 per cent of Indians suffer from it compared with 49 per cent in Pakistan. The Multilevel Poverty Index developed by the Oxford University Poverty and Human Development Institute puts the number of poor at the staggering figure of 645 million. India has one of the highest child and maternal mortality rates in the world. According to the UN Population Division, India comes at 150 out of 194 countries on infant mortality, which is worse than Nepal and Bhutan, and 44 per cent of Indian children below five are malnourished compared with 5 per cent in China, 2 per cent in Brazil, and 25 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa. Every year, as many as 1.7 million children under five die of easily preventable diseases such as diarrhoea. And of those who survive, 48 per cent are stunted for lack of nutrients. India's basic rural medical care is poorer than even its strife-ridden neighbour Bangladesh.³⁰ All this makes a most depressing reading against the background of considerable economic growth. As Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen put it recently, '[t]here is probably no other example in the history of world

development of an economy growing so fast for so long with such limited results in terms of broad-based social progress.' ³¹

The prospect of breaking through the cycle of poverty depends on, among other things, primary and secondary education. Here again, the Indian record leaves much to be desired. Thanks to poor infrastructure, teacher absenteeism, inadequately trained teachers, and lack of leadership, state schools have proved so disappointing that even the poor opt for private schools or tuition classes. While around 10 per cent, 6 per cent, and 17 per cent of children in the UK, Canada, and US respectively go to private schools, the figure is as high as 29 per cent in India and over 50 per cent in states like Kerala, Nagaland, and Manipur.³² According to the *Annual Status of Education Report* prepared by the NGO Pratham, 50 per cent of class IV children cannot read class II-level texts. A recent comparative study by the Programme for International Student Assessment conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) showed that among 74 participating countries, students from even the high-performing Indian states like Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh came last but one and just above Kyrgyzstan in reading, maths, and science. An Indian eight-grade student was found equal to a Shanghai second-grade and a South Korean third-grade student.

There are thus two sides to India. One is affluent, comprising about a fifth of the population to which should be added another fifth realistically aspiring to join its ranks, dreaming of becoming an economic superpower, globally integrated, and leading a life style that is beyond the reach of and even offends the tastes of most Western people. The other India, comprising two-fifths of the population whose ranks another one-fifth is constantly in danger of joining, is poor, decaying, barely managing to survive, globally and even nationally invisible, largely confined to the villages and the margins of small and large cities, and subject to the rigor of but benefiting only a little from globalization.

These two sides of India, the affluent or what was misguidedly called 'shining' India and the poor or dark India, live next to each other in a deeply asymmetrical relationship. The former is loud and unmistakable with its impact felt in almost all spheres of life. The latter leads a shadowy existence and is largely noticed only when it turns dangerous. These two faces of India are not accidental products of India's economic development, but casually and morally related. Although it would be

wrong to say that the affluent India is built on and only made possible by the dark India, its prosperity owes a great deal to the latter. It is based on, among other things, low even starvation wages, casual and migrant labour, weak industrial regulations, displacement of tribal communities and poor urban slum dwellers, inhuman working conditions, compulsory and inequitable acquisition of land, and weakened trade unions, all of which play a large part in creating and disciplining the dark India.

The moral connection between the two faces of India is even deeper. As citizens, poor Indians are entitled to a decent standard of life and to their share of the collective resources of the country. This is also enjoined by the Constitution in its Preamble and the Directive Principles, which though non-justiciable are expected to guide government policy. The poor also have the ability to destabilize and endanger the security of the rich India, and the latter should be grateful that they have not done this so far. The morally callous affluent India fails not only to discharge but also acknowledge its responsibility to them and sometimes dismisses the welfare schemes for them as cheap populist gimmicks wasting resources that could be better used to fuel the country's one-sided growth.

The deep and growing disparity in income, life chances, political expectations, world views, and hopes for the future between the two sides threaten to undermine the moral and political consensus that has sustained Indian democracy so far. The psychic distance between the two is great and increasing and their 'empathy gap' is widening. The affluent India is increasingly opting out of the shared life by such means as the gated communities, privatized security, private medicine, and private education, leaving the poor in the care of precarious, sub-standard, and inefficiently delivered public services. Subjected to the contradictory pressures of both sides, the state faces the most difficult task of finding a common ground, a shared national purpose, and commanding the loyalty of one without forfeiting that of the other.

In recent years, the Indian state has begun to wake up to the enormity of the problem and embarked on several national- and state-level programmes relating to the basic needs of the dark India, such as rural employment, health, primary education, and housing. The MGNREGA, involving an outlay of several billion dollars and representing the largest entitlement programme in the world, was initially

resisted by the Congress and accepted only when it realized that it had no hope of winning the elections of 2004. It reaches 40 million rural households, guaranteeing each a minimum of 100 days' work. More than half of them belong to the SCs and the STs, and nearly half are women. Aadhaar-linked direct cash transfers into the bank accounts of the poor and the Food Security Bill are other examples of the power of democratic pressure.

Some of these programmes have been moderately successful in achieving their limited objectives.³³ Others have not because they are inadequately thought through, poorly implemented, micromanaged by the central government, weakly monitored, or subverted by corporate interests and corrupt bureaucrats. Even the successful ones suffer from three basic limitations.³⁴ They address poverty but not the equally disturbing fact of inequality, which is greater than in most other countries including China and the US and renders common life virtually impossible. Second, even so far as the limited focus on poverty is concerned, the latter is so narrowly defined that the programmes do little more than avoid starvation deaths. Third, little attempt is made to build the basic human capacities of the poor, to equip them with the abilities and skills needed to take control of their lives and create a world of new opportunities for themselves and their children. Many programmes including the MGNREGA and the Food Security Act focus on poverty not the poor, on how they can survive rather than how they can break out of the vicious cycle of poverty, ignore the vitally necessary and capacity-building health, education, and other public goods, and raise the question whether they are in their current forms the best way to address the problem.

The state's attitude to the poor is often disturbingly patronizing. It is its job to alleviate acute poverty and provide such basic public services as clean water, regular supply of electricity, decent housing, and means of transport. As one would expect in a society with a weak sense of equality and rights and in which the state dominates society, the Indian state sees this not as its duty but as a discretionary favour, an act of generosity and benevolence. Politicians in power or aspiring to acquire it proclaim that 'they will give the people' clean water, electricity, or whatever, implying that the government not the people owns the required resources, that politicians are free to dispose of them as they please, and that they will use them to provide basic services as an act

of kindness in return for appropriate expressions of gratitude including electoral favour. Ordinary citizens, especially the poor, are made to feel like supplicants, even glorified beggars, receiving what is really their due as an expression of government generosity. The fact that most of the programmes for the poor are named (of which there is no need) and that too after politicians, usually the ruling family, reinforces the point. The dominant approach to and the discourse surrounding anti-poverty programmes not only offends the dignity of the poor but almost amounts to their institutionalized humiliation.

The poor in India pose a puzzle. They have a numerical advantage, being somewhere between a quarter and a third of the population, vote in large numbers, and enjoy the freedom to organize and protest. Yet they have rarely put eradication of poverty at the top of their political agenda or mounted vigorous campaigns. There are several reasons for this, of which two are particularly important.

First, poverty does not by itself generate a demand on the government to eradicate it. Much depends on how the poor themselves understand their predicament, and here cultural factors play an important part. In the Indian, especially the dominant Hindu tradition, poverty has rarely been a subject of much concern. The poor are largely invisible in its moral imagination, confined to the margins of society, and either ignored or seen as objects of pity and compassion. Castes limit their members' social universe and prevent mutual concern and collective action. The causes of poverty are believed to lie with the poor, such as their alleged defects of intelligence and character or past karma or usually both. If the better off feel troubled, which they generally do not, they may do odd acts of charity. And the government believes that its duty is limited to providing emergency relief. In the long Hindu history, it is difficult to find examples of individuals standing up for let alone leading struggles on behalf of the poor, nor is there much literature criticizing, examining the causes of, and urging action against poverty. We had to wait until the late nineteenth century for the Hindu moral callousness to be highlighted and attacked. Swami Vivekananda was one of its most vocal and influential critics, followed by many others including Gandhi who, when asked what distressed him most about India, said, 'the hard heartedness' and 'callousness' of the rich and middle-class Indians.³⁵ Even the otherwise progressive Indian Constitution did not place removal of poverty at the centre of

its concern and include the right to the basic conditions of life among the Fundamental Rights.

Thanks to the deep impact of the traditional culture, most poor people do not generally define their condition as one of poverty, a comparative socially generated condition, but rather as one of physical survival, and live with it as long as they can eke out a livelihood. If some see it as a condition requiring an explanation and redress, they tend to blame themselves. They also compare themselves to their parental generation or some other reference group, and think that their own lives are not as bad or poor as theirs. They notice that some among them are beginning to improve their lot and hope that their turn too would come. If they do not see improvement in their lives, they are not always clear who to hold responsible and, more importantly, who could be expected to do something about it. Many of them do not expect the government to do anything more than provide subsidized food and other basic necessities in the benevolent form of *sarkar ma-baap*. It is striking that in India, the government is widely blamed for inflation but not for poverty. Even when the poor blame the government, they are too atomized, dispirited, or preoccupied with the struggle for survival to mount a sustained pressure on it. In short, the move from degradation and deprivation to a concerted political struggle to eradicate its structural causes requires both a radical ideology and a political party capable of mobilizing the poor and their middle-class sympathizers around it. The Indian socialists initially offered both but fell victim to internal divisions, ideological confusion, temptation of government offices, and short-term casteist politics. As for the communists, they are deeply handicapped by their abstract and non-contextualized language of social revolution, poorly articulated vision of India, hostility to the market, inability to speak in popular idioms, failure to relate to the reality of castes, and uneven performance in office, and remain an increasingly marginal presence in the country's political and even intellectual life.

The second reason for the absence of a concerted anti-poverty programme has to do with the way in which poverty is bound up with caste. Caste is not just a social but also a socio-economic institution, signifying an individual's place in the social as well as economic hierarchy, and offers one avenue through which to attack poverty. For several reasons, the poor and their political leaders have preferred to address poverty not directly but through the medium of castes. Caste is a living

reality, a matter of daily experience and hence an easily recognizable point of reference. With its network of contacts and shared memories, it is also a readily mobilizable basis of collective action. Since lower castes are not only poor but also have a low social status and suffer from various kinds of indignity, the caste-based anti-poverty struggle links up with and derives its energy from the concomitant struggle for dignity, self-respect, and social equality. Caste-based mobilization is also encouraged by the Constitution of India, which recognizes castes as the basis for prioritizing claims and positive discrimination. Although it limits this to the SCs, it is open to others to broaden the category, especially as the Constitution also speaks of socially and educationally backward groups.

While subsuming poverty and fighting it under the banner of caste is understandable and has its attractions, it suffers from serious disadvantages. It excludes poor non-Hindus and makes it difficult to form cross-communal alliances. Castes qua castes can only fight for caste-specific goals, not for collective provisions that are crucial for releasing people from the vicious cycle of poverty. Since castes are treated as homogeneous units, their internal inequality gets ignored, with the result that the better off garner the benefits and the rest gain little. Castes are divisive and their relations competitive and conflictual, making it difficult to form the cross-caste alliances necessary for an anti-poverty struggle. When caste mobilization is aimed not just at the reduction of poverty but also at social equality, self-respect, and political power, the latter sometimes tend to acquire greater importance, especially from the new middle-class leadership, and the issues relating to poverty get subordinated to the politics of identity. Articulating and fighting poverty through the medium of castes has the further disadvantage of forfeiting the support of the traditional Left that disapproves of caste-based movements. The political parties who care for the poor need to address poverty directly, in its own terms, and tackle its deeper roots in the economic structure. This is appreciated by most of them, but it is a long-term project requiring mass education, a carefully worked out programme of action and cultivation of grass-roots support, which they are constantly tempted to put aside in favour of short-term electoral gains that a caste-based politics brings.

Indian democracy has a mixed record, some spectacular and unexpected achievements going hand in hand with several glaring and foreseeable failures, making it what Ramchandra Guha calls a 'fifty percent democracy'³⁶. It has conducted free and fair elections on a historically unprecedented scale; punished complacent, arrogant, incompetent, or blatantly corrupt governments; affirmed the power and the dignity of its people; and earned them global respect. Despite occasional surrender to intolerant voices, it has provided public space to a wide variety of views, encouraged a robust public sphere, and fostered the spirit of defiance and dissent. It has introduced the idea of equality, though not the idea of fraternity, in a deeply hierarchical society, given a sense of dignity and self-respect to the millions humiliated for centuries, and released forces conducive to the creation of a liberal, egalitarian, moral culture. It has nurtured the mediating sphere of civil society between the hitherto all-powerful society and the imported institution of the state, and expanded the area of freely formed civic relations.

Democratic politics has brought marginalized and oppressed groups into and given them a stake in the political system, and empowered religious minorities so that no Hindu party can hope to come to power without their support. It has respected the identity and the desire for autonomy of the regionally concentrated ethnic minorities, and weakened or won over some though not all of the secessionist movements. It has encouraged a dialogue between groups that had for centuries remained exclusive and closed, helped forge a shared political language in which to articulate and debate their differences, and united most of the country around a shared sense of national identity. No longer confined to the political sphere, democracy is being extended to other areas of life as well where it is widely regarded as the only basis of legitimate authority and sets their tone.

The limitations of Indian democracy are just as obvious, though some of them are often ignored or explained away. There are parts of India where the reach of democracy is tenuous such as Kashmir and, to a lesser extent, the North-East. Their attempts to redress genuine grievances are seen as threats to India's integrity and put down with much ruthlessness, releasing a vicious cycle of violence in which democratic institutions and practices are the obvious casualty. Although Kashmir and the North-East pose certain strategic problems and are unique in

that respect, the fact that they have a large non-Hindu majority suggests that the protective reach of Indian democracy and the political sympathies of its citizens do not yet extend to non-Hindu regions. The tribal struggle to protect their ways of life against the aggressive and exploitative designs of mining and other corporate interests and the state's repressive treatment of it is another area where Indian democracy has not been much in evidence.

In earlier sections, I pointed to other limitations of Indian democracy, most of which relate to the structure and functioning of the political system, especially the representative institutions that constitute the heart and the head of any democracy. Indian political life is marked by weak public norms, and even these are often violated with impunity from the lowest to the highest levels of government. It is pockmarked by little and large dynasties that distort the normal processes of democratic politics. The elected representatives include a disturbing number of mediocre, self-serving, and even criminal individuals unable or unwilling to take an inclusive and broad view of the common good. They have little institutionalized contact with the electorate, and have for the most part reduced democracy to a government of, by, and even for the representatives. Their quality of political deliberation is often disappointing and rarely measures up to the gravity and complexity of the country's problems. Connected with and arising out of all these is Indian democracy's most shameful failure to address the systematic degradation and relentless wastage of the hundreds of millions of its poor citizens.

This has been the record of Indian democracy so far. We may ask if the Lok Sabha elections of 2014, conducted against the background of intense dissatisfaction with both the government and the political system and much national soul searching, mark a new departure, a new trend towards revitalizing Indian democracy. In some respects, they reflect and even accentuate the weaknesses of Indian democracy. They were the most expensive in Indian history and involved huge unaccounted contributions from large business houses. The proportion of MPs with criminal records is slightly higher than in the past, as is the percentage of the rich. There are more *crorepatis* in this Lok Sabha than in any other, more of them in the BJP than in other parties, and the average assets of an MP amount to Rs 14.6 crore as opposed to Rs 5.3 crore in the previous one. The elections were highly personalized, had a

presidential character not seen in Indira Gandhi's or even Nehru's time, and the political parties and their policies counted for little. Debates during the election at the hustings and in the media were polarized and no better than in the previous ones. The two communist parties managed only 20 MPs between them, half of what they had in 2009 and a fifth of that in 2004. This narrows the ideological spectrum and reduces a hitherto important voice to a barely audible murmur. The elections virtually annihilated the Congress party, reducing its number to 44, a quarter of that in 2009, and leaving the country without an opposition party at a time when it is most needed.

Narendra Modi's domination of his party during the election gave him unique pre-eminence and led to a government in which decision-making is centralized in the Prime Minister's Office, political power is concentrated in his hands, his ministers are closely watched and firmly guided, and the old authoritarian culture continues to characterize the conduct of the government. Since the BJP has a limited pool of political talent and the prime minister is anxious to deliver on his promises, this is understandable, but it is carried further than is necessary and does not regenerate either the cabinet system or the institutional structure of government. Although the prime minister reverentially bowed to the Parliament on the first day of his visit, he has neither attended it regularly nor participated in many of its debates. Corporate leaders who helped with the expenses and the media coverage of the election have been duly rewarded and given pride of place on important official occasions. They were highly visible at the prime minister's swearing-in ceremony, but none from the deprived sections of society was to be seen.

Both during and after the elections, Hindu religious vocabulary and cultural symbols figured prominently in a way they have never done before. Although the prime minister has rarely expressed let alone acted on anti-minority sentiments, a climate has been created in which these are freely, even aggressively, expressed by some Hindu politicians and religious leaders. It is difficult to say how this would play out in the long run. Being no longer hedged in by artificial constraints and feeling free to express their collective identity, the Hindus might feel more secure and confident, respect similar self-expressions by religious minorities, and develop a religiously hospitable and tolerant secularism, different from Nehru's but home-grown and no less democratic.

On the other hand, the Hindus, now enjoying the patronage of the government, could become more aggressive, vengeful, keen to settle real or imaginary historical scores, anxious to turn all Indians including the non-Hindus into their model of 'good cultural Hindus', and end up undermining both democracy and any acceptable version of secularism. As of now, the latter trend is patchy, shallow, largely limited to the overzealous RSS activists, and lacks active support from the government and the Hindu majority. How things develop in the future depends on, among other things, the internal equations of power within the BJP, the penetration of the RSS into important ministries and public institutions, and revitalization of secular forces.

The 2014 elections also revealed several healthy trends. Conducted with remarkable efficiency and impartiality among a massive 840 million strong electorate, it demonstrated the country's great organizational skill and political discipline. The strength of India's tradition of a graceful transfer of power was evident when the hitherto arrogant but now thoroughly humiliated Congress leadership joined in the victory celebration of a man it had relentlessly mocked and who in turn had ridiculed it in well-chosen epithets delivered with a mixture of contempt and earthy humour. The election saw the highest ever turnout of just over 66 per cent, showing how much the Indian electorate valued democracy and believed in its power to change things. As many as 60 lakhs of them used the newly offered option of voting for none of the candidates on offer, reflecting both their political sophistication and their determination to administer a rebuke to political parties. For the first time and uniquely among democracies, the Election Commission of India brought the party manifestos under its Model Code of Conduct and challenged those making unrealizable promises.

Although caste played a part, especially in the choice of candidates in certain regions, it mattered far less than in most previous elections. The caste-based Bahujan Samaj Party and the Socialist Party were routed in the UP, and the BJP drew its support from all castes. Although the skilfully deployed religion played a part, it did not matter as much as people had feared. Out of the total of 87 constituencies with a Muslim majority, the BJP won 45. In UP, 27 constituencies had a strong Muslim presence; the BJP won 26 of them. At a rough estimate, nearly 20 per cent of Muslims voted for it, partly because it was attracted by the party's appeal to development and partly because it thought that its

Hindu rhetoric was unlikely to amount to much in practice. Like the Muslim vote, the Hindu vote too was divided, suggesting that many Hindus were sceptical of the BJP's long-term agenda. It would seem that although BJP benefited from its Hindu religious subtext, it owed its victory primarily to the fact that the prime minister concentrated on four issues—economic development, good governance, his untainted record, and national pride—all secular. The ingenious way in which he blended religious and secular appeals, using the language of religion to evoke a cultural and historical sensibility but not letting it dominate his political agenda, gives some idea of the kind of secularism he would like to see.

The 2014 elections brought India's caste and class snobbery into the open and dealt with it head on. Modi's socially and economically lowly *chaiwala* background was treated with much condescension and ridicule by some of the most respected political leaders and media commentators, and was even said to disqualify him from occupying the august position of prime minister. This forced the rest of the country to take a stand, and to its great credit, it felt angered and alienated by these sentiments. Modi skilfully used the occasion not only to discredit his detractors but also to raise his status as a champion of the poor and long humiliated 'little Indians'. In doing so, he gave India a new image of itself as a land of equal opportunity in which even a *chaiwala* could aspire to and secure the highest position in the country, in just the same way that an ordinary American can hope to travel from the log cabin to the White House. This is a massive step in the evolution of Indian democracy. Modi of course is not the first prime minister to come from the ranks of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), but he is the first to become one by fighting an election. Although deferential to corporate interests and celebrities, he has paradoxically given dignity and public presence to the 'little Indian', something he claims to share with Mahatma Gandhi and which partly explains his constant invocation of him. Like Gandhi, he too wants to regenerate the rural India where 'little Indians live', and ensure them clean toilets and other basic necessities that surprisingly received little attention from his predecessors. Given his commitment to corporate capital and reliance on it as the engine of development, it is not clear whether Modi will do much more for the neglected Indians, but he has at least energized them, given them a voice, and widened their horizon of possibilities.

Another important feature of the election was the way in which it brought into focus Nehru's 'national philosophy' that has hitherto set the parameters of Indian political discourse and provided the broadly shared basis of Indian democracy. Alongside the attack on Nehru's current heirs and even the Nehru dynasty itself, many of the important components of his 'national philosophy' came under attack both during and after the election. These include socialism, secularism, non-alignment, relative economic self-sufficiency, and even the scientific temper. In some cases, the BJP rejected these goals; in others, the Nehruvian interpretation of them. In either case, its own alternatives remain poorly worked out. While some sections of it remain wedded to *swadeshi*, the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, hostility to Muslims, militarization of the Hindus, Hinduization of the minorities, Hindu culture as the basis of Indian nationhood, close ties with the RSS, and so on, many others take different views on most of these. They emphasize integration into the global economy, neoliberalism, cooperative federalism, international respectability, equal treatment of minorities, a strong Hindu cultural ethos within the limits of the Indian Constitution, and relative distancing from the RSS. This new Hindutva, which I might call Hindutva mark two, obviously shares much in common with its older cousin, but it is also different in significant respects, and is not just its softer version but a recalibration and rebalancing of its components. The unresolved tension between the two, evident in the mixed messages sent out by the BJP leaders in recent months, deprives it of a coherent identity. Even if Hindutva mark two wins out in the BJP as seems most likely, its components do not all point in the same direction and provide the basis of a coherent and broad-based vision of India.

India then is moving away from the old Nehruvian consensus but is not sure what to put in its place, creating an ideological vacuum at the heart of its political life. The transitional stage offers a unique opportunity to conduct a vigorous democratic debate on a new 'national philosophy'. If India failed to take it either by nostalgically holding on to the Nehruvian consensus as the Congress is doing or by adventurously embracing the bunch of poorly worked out ideas thrown up by the BJP, it would lack a sense of direction and national purpose so necessary for the stability of its democracy in a volatile neighbourhood.

In this context, the recent stunning victory of the Aam Adami Party (AAP) in the Delhi elections marks a significant moment in the evolution of Indian democracy. It won because, among other things, it represented a new kind of politics that was in sharp contrast to the current one and captured the mood of the electorate. As we noted earlier, the current style sees the state as the primary agent of change, centralizes power within it, and limits democracy largely to the election of representatives. For it, political parties are little more than instruments for capturing power on the basis of their leader's charisma and caste and other considerations. It lacks transparency and accountability, often connives at the misuse of public office, and creates a climate of deep popular distrust and cynicism.

Rightly convinced that the pathology of democracy can only be cured by having more rather than less of it, the AAP's alternative politics involve a degree and depth of democratization not seen in India since Mahatma Gandhi went about reorganizing the Congress and giving it a mass basis in the 1920s. It puts people at the centre of politics and seeks to secure more or less full-blooded popular sovereignty, which the Constitution had rejected in favour of parliamentary democracy. The AAP replaces statism with state-civil society partnership, and within the state, it aims to devolve power to the local communities and build the political system from bottom upwards. As a party, it is democratically constituted and its members decide its structure and objectives through a federal internal organization. They are actively involved in the selection of their representatives from among men and women of proven honesty, integrity, and commitment. The AAP wants ministers to live broadly the same way as ordinary citizens do, be subject to the same rules, and not inhabit a protected superior world of their own. It proposes various mechanisms to prevent misuse of power and financial corruption, including transparent decision-making, strict accountability, minimization of discretion, and even sting operations by citizens.

Whatever the AAP's concrete achievements, the very fact that a political party should commit itself to a vision, define it selflessly in terms of restoring power to the people, seriously endeavor to live by it, and openly admit its mistakes is a radically new phenomenon in Indian politics. Not surprisingly, it has fired the Indian political imagination, generated considerable energy, and raised hopes for a democratic renaissance in the country as a whole.

Indian democracy has been periodically revitalized by popular movements which, even when they failed in their immediate objectives, nurtured neglected sensibilities, widened the horizon of possibilities, raised the level of popular expectations, and pressured the political system to change in small and large ways. The AAP has done this to a remarkable extent. Whether it can lead to a new political formation and revitalize democracy depends on its ability to address questions it has so far neglected.

Born in Delhi in the context of Anna Hazare's campaign against corruption, the AAP is deeply shaped by its provenance. India is not Delhi and the AAP needs to widen its point of reference. Corruption is not the only important issue and the AAP needs a different prism through which to analyse India. It is no longer just a movement and needs to acquire a stable organizational structure with its concomitant ideological and institutional discipline without losing its fluidity and dynamism. Its ministerial and organizational arms need to work in tandem without denying the indispensable role of the other, which neither the Congress nor the BJP ever managed to achieve. Elections are won with the help of charismatic leaders who, however, tend to be authoritarian and intolerant of dissent. The AAP needs to resolve this dilemma, which it has so far failed to do as seen in the expulsion of Yogendra Yadav and Prashant Bhushan from its Political Affairs Committee. The AAP's new form of politics too needs reconsideration. It is centred on the process rather than the objectives of politics, and does not say much about the kind of social and economic order a democratic politics should aim to achieve. As long as it is limited to Delhi and enjoys limited freedom of action, it can afford to ignore large ideological questions but not when it seeks to become a national movement. All successful politics involve an interplay of local issues and a general ideology, and the AAP's concentration hitherto has been on the former. In its campaign against corruption, it took an untenably puristic view of politics and expected its office bearers to be wholly without a blemish. This makes impossible demands on them, and paradoxically creates a climate in which people are constantly obsessed with their own and others' small and large failings and lapses. The AAP's view of politics harbours a populist streak, and discourages hard and unpopular decisions that are the very substance of all especially radical politics.

India moves slowly, unevenly, often without a long-term strategic vision, under the compulsions of events, and pays a heavy price in human suffering before getting its direction broadly right, not always of course but in many cases. Born in a climate of intense intercommunal hatred, it eventually managed to tame though not to overcome it. Although it has not yet grown out of the suicidal doctrine of Hindutva, it has generated enough intellectual and political pressure to transform much of its dangerous doctrinal content and moderate its practice. It not only brought in the Emergency as a desperate measure but also put an end to it and punished its chief agents. For decades, it turned to the state as the sole agent of economic growth but later changed track and was pleasantly surprised by some of the results. Once committed to a strong centre, the country is now at ease with the devolution of power to various layers of self-government. It has overcome its earlier obsession with cultural homogeneity and takes pride in the plurality of its regional and cultural identities. Having initially copied Western, mainly British institutions and practices, it later gave them distinctly Indian forms and even threw up new ones such as the Lok Adalat, public interest litigation, epistolary jurisdiction, lokpal, asymmetrical federation, and an activist Supreme Court, thereby enriching the theoretical and institutional resources of the democratic tradition in India and even the world at large. India has rich regenerative resources such as civil society activism, a tradition of protest, a relatively long exposure to democratic practice, individuals of great courage and integrity, and the pressure of the enlightened sections of the professional classes and the Indian diaspora. There is every reason to hope that in its own familiar fashion, it should find ways of revitalizing its democracy and raising the quality of the wider moral and political culture in which it is embedded.

PART II

LIMITS OF DIALOGUE

EINSTEIN ON GANDHI'S NON-VIOLENCE*

Albert Einstein held Mahatma Gandhi in the highest esteem and called him one of the greatest moral leaders of all times. Gandhi's was one of the four pictures on the walls of his office in his house, the other three being of Faraday, Maxwell, and Newton.¹ Prima facie this is puzzling. Einstein was a rationalist, whereas Gandhi, though not an anti-rationalist or irrationalist, assigned reason a limited place in his view of life. Einstein welcomed the modern world of science and technology; Gandhi was highly critical of it. Although Einstein admired Gandhi and was fascinated by him, he does not seem to have read anything more than Gandhi's autobiography, (which he called 'one of the greatest testimonies of true human greatness'), his few public statements, and newspaper reports of the Indian Independence movement led by him. He did not write at length about Gandhi either, and his views on him are expressed in his published and unpublished remarks written in response to specific requests. In this chapter, I discuss what he thought to be Gandhi's great and unique contribution.

Einstein first wrote to Gandhi in 1931 when the latter was in London to attend the Second Round Table Conference. It is not clear what prompted him to write, but it would seem that like many in the West, he was deeply impressed with Gandhi's Dandi March in 1930 in

*I am grateful to Albert Einstein Archives, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for granting me the permission to quote from Einstein's letters and messages.

This chapter is an extensively revised version of 'Einstein's Assessment of Gandhi', *The Round Table*, October, no. 320, 1991.

which thousands of unarmed men and women broke an unjust law and patiently suffered great physical brutality at the hands of the police.² The march was covered far more extensively and sympathetically in the US than in Britain, and the coverage had a distinctly religious orientation, comparing Gandhi to Jesus and his march to episodes in Jesus's life. Furthermore, for quite some time, Einstein had been deeply worried about the climate of violence dominating Europe, manifested not only in its glorification by many a philosopher, artist, and writer but also in the rise of the extremist movements, especially fascism and Nazism of which Einstein was himself a victim. Like many other progressive intellectuals of the time, he was groping for an alternative to violence and thought that Gandhi offered one.³ As he wrote to Gandhi:

You have shown by all you have done that we can achieve the ideal even without resorting to violence. We can conquer those votaries of violence by the non-violent method. Your example will inspire and help humanity to put an end to a conflict based on violence with international help and co-operation guaranteeing peace of the world.

With this expression of my devotion and admiration I hope to be able to meet you face to face.

Gandhi's reply of 18 October 1931 was short and handwritten. It read:

Dear Friend,

I was delighted to have your beautiful letter sent through Sundaram. It is a great consolation to me that the work I am doing finds favour in your sight. I do indeed wish that we could meet face to face and that too in India at my Ashram.

Yours sincerely,
M.K. Gandhi.

It is interesting that Gandhi more or less took Einstein's compliments for granted and, although he implicitly recognized Einstein's stature in the second sentence, he did not return the compliment. He reciprocated the latter's desire for a personal meeting, but suggested that it should be in India, and that too at his remote and ill-furnished ashram.

In 1939, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, then professor of Eastern religions in the University of Oxford, invited Einstein to contribute a short piece to the *Festschrift* he was editing to mark Gandhi's 70th birthday. As was his general practice, Einstein wrote a short tribute in German. In its fairly accurate English translation, it appeared in the *Festschrift* as follows:

Gandhi is unique in political history. He has invented an entirely new and humane technique for the liberation struggle of an oppressed people and carried it out with the greatest energy and devotion. The moral civilized world may be far more durable than would appear likely in our present age with its exaggeration of brute force. For the work of statesmen is permanent only in so far as they arouse and consolidate the moral forces of their peoples through their personal example and educating influence.

We are fortunate and should be grateful that fate has bestowed upon us so luminous a contemporary—a beacon to the generations to come.

Einstein once again credited Gandhi with inventing a new and humane method of political action, a point he had made earlier but which he now put more forcefully. In his view, Gandhi had not only invented a new method but also demonstrated its truth by personal example, a rare achievement that, in Einstein's view, made him a unique historical figure. Furthermore, unlike politicians over the centuries, his method activated and mobilized the moral energies of his fellow men and showed how politics should be conducted. Einstein thought that in a world suffused with the spirit of cynicism and violence, Gandhi's political stature might not be fully appreciated, but he had no doubt that his new method and personal example were bound to inspire thinking men all over the world for generations to come. For Einstein, a statesman as different from a politician sought to mobilize the humane and noble impulses of his people around an inspiring vision of society, and did so not by preaching but by setting a personal example. Gandhi, in his view, had done that better than most and raised politics to a new level.

Einstein's *Out of My Later Years* that was published in 1940 contains a remarkable passage on Gandhi. It claims to be a tribute to Gandhi on his 70th birthday. Einstein had already written one for the Gandhi in *Festschrift* edited by Radhakrishnan. It is difficult to know why he wrote another and for whom. Perhaps it was the first draft of the article he had sent to Radhakrishnan. In any case, it read as follows⁴:

A leader of his people, unsupported by any outward authority; a politician whose success rests not upon craft nor the mastery of technical devices, but simply on the convincing power of his personality; a victorious fighter who has always scorned the use of force; a man of wisdom and humility, armed with resolve and inflexible consistency, who has

devoted all his strength to the uplifting of his people and the betterment of their lot; a man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being, and thus at all times risen superior.

Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon the earth.

The last paragraph is an extraordinarily generous assessment of Gandhi, especially as it came from someone of Einstein's stature. Once again Einstein praised Gandhi's great moral and personal qualities, dedication to the cause of his people especially the poor and downtrodden, and his discovery of the method of non-violence. By the sheer force of his personality, Gandhi had mobilized the moral energies of his countrymen and inspired them to great moral heights. In Einstein's view, Gandhi showed that the spirit was mightier than brute force and that determined individuals could defeat an oppressive political system. The image of a 'simple human being' asserting his and his people's dignity against a heavily armed government, conveyed by Gandhi's Dandi March of 1930, had clearly left an abiding mark on Einstein.

Gandhi was assassinated on 30 January 1948. At the request of the organizers of a memorial meeting in the US, Einstein wrote a tribute.

Everyone who strives to secure a better future for the human race is shaken by Gandhi's tragic end. He died as the victim of his own principle of 'non-violence' since he refused armed personal protection at a time of national confusion and general turmoil in his own country. It was his unshakeable belief that violence is in itself evil and therefore it had to be avoided when striving for the highest and just goals.

He lived for this belief and led a great nation to its liberation. He showed that the use of cunning and other tricks which make up the usual repertoire of politics is not the only way of getting people to follow, but rather people would also respond to the living example of a morally superior way of life.

The reverence towards Gandhi all over the world rests on the mostly unconscious view that he alone among the statesmen of our morally decadent times represented a higher level of human relations towards which we must strive with all our strength. We must learn that a bearable future for humanity is only possible when decisions even in the international world are based on right and law instead of on naked power as they have been up to now.

Einstein here repeats his earlier assessment of Gandhi but lays particular stress on three things. First, Gandhi rose above our violent and 'morally decadent times' and showed that a superior way of organizing society and resolving domestic and international conflicts was possible. Second, he demonstrated that far from being morally obtuse, cynical, or gullible, ordinary men and women were capable of responding to moral appeals and rising to great heights. Gandhi restored our faith in them and showed that heroic morality was not beyond their reach. Third, Gandhi provided a rare example of what it means to live a principled life. Totally committed to the principle of non-violence, he thought nothing of sacrificing his life for it, and refused to accept violence even in the benign form of police protection when repeated threats were made to his life.

In another message, written shortly afterwards and broadcasted by the United Nations, Einstein reiterated these views but introduced a new point. He had hitherto praised Gandhi's non-violent method but had not spelt out what it involved. In this message, he took non-cooperation to be its central component. As he saw it, Gandhi's method consisted in countering violence by refusing to give any form of direct or indirect moral and material assistance to its perpetrator. This was how Gandhi himself often presented it. Evil existed because good actively or passively and directly or indirectly cooperated with it. When it refused to cooperate, it denied evil not only the material means of its survival but also the equally necessary inner self-confidence and moral legitimacy. For Gandhi, evil could not last long under such conditions.

In December 1949, Einstein wrote again about Gandhi. It is not clear what prompted him to do so. He wrote:

We can all be grateful that we are now able to witness the completion of Mahatma Gandhi's life work of the liberation of India. This liberation is in itself an event of world historical significance. Even more significant is the fact that this goal was achieved without the use of force. For the first time mankind has been shown what can be achieved with a firm will and well-thought out action and without recourse to arms. If nations are able to comprehend the full magnitude of these events and adjust their behaviour accordingly, then it would not be too difficult to overcome on a permanent basis the current dangerous situation.

Einstein here adds little to what he had said earlier about Gandhi. He concentrates on Indian Independence and stresses its world historical

significance. In his view, India showed that violence was not necessary to achieve justice, and that brute force could be successfully countered by a determined and well-planned non-violent movement. If the rest of the world could grasp its 'full magnitude' and act accordingly, human history could move to a different rhythm on a 'permanent basis'.

It would seem that Einstein's various tributes to Gandhi, especially those made after his assassination, had attracted considerable attention in the Indian media and provoked a hostile reaction in some right-wing Hindu circles. One of them, Om Prakash Kaliol, a professor of physics at one of the colleges in Punjab, wrote a strange letter to Einstein. Godse and Apte, Gandhi's assassin and his accomplice respectively, had been executed, and Kaliol was evidently unhappy about it. He wrote:

Dear Professor Einstein,

A good deal has been appearing in the Indian press for the last few weeks, regarding your views about Mr. M.K. Gandhi of India. I wonder how a rationalist like you could have even the slightest regard for an irrationalist of the type of Gandhi, who would attribute the occurrence of earthquakes to the political rivalry between the Hindus and Muslims!

Since your word matters much in scientific world, I would request you to study Gandhian philosophy in more detail—if you have time enough to waste on this useless pursuit—before forming an opinion about this greatest enemy of scientific rationalism.

Have you known Gandhi's assassins—Pandit Godse and Shriyuta Apte? Do you know how much regard they had for you? Do you know, till the day of their execution Apte continued to teach your Theory of Relativity to his comrade Godse?

The books, which the Execution Staff of the Ambala jail (where Godse and Apte were hanged on 15th November, 1949) have returned to their relatives, include a good deal of scientific and mathematical literature, especially Theory of Relativity and Godse has left a note on one of them, which he wrote but a few hours before walking to the gallows!

A reply to this letter will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,
Om Prakash Kaliol

It is striking that Kaliol refers to Godse as 'Pandit' and to Apte as 'shriyut' but to Gandhi as 'Mr. M.K. Gandhi of India' as if Einstein did not know where he was from. He cunningly stresses Godse's and Apte's scientific rationalism including their alleged interest in Einstein's theory

of relativity as against Gandhi's alleged irrationalism and seems to have thought that this was the most effective way to embarrass a rationalist like Einstein.

Einstein's reply was prompt and predictable.

Dear Sir,

I received your letter of December 13th and can well understand your attitude. But I cannot agree with it. It is true that Gandhi was to some extent anti-rationalist or at least a man who did not believe in the independent value of knowledge. But the unique greatness of Gandhi lies in his moral fervor and in his unparalleled devotion to it. What he achieved in convincing the people of India of his method of non-violence cannot be over-estimated. I believe that it is by far the greatest achievement in the political field in the last centuries—not only for India but for the whole of humanity. Gandhi's *Autobiography* is one of the greatest testimonies of true human greatness.

Can you wonder that I am astonished about your attitude even if you have not the right understanding for Gandhi's greatness? Do you believe it is justified to murder anyone who has some opinion different from yours?

Sincerely yours,
Albert Einstein

Prima facie, it is surprising that Einstein took Kaliol's letter seriously enough to reply to it. There is no reason to believe that he felt challenged by Kaliol's criticism. It was Einstein's practice to reply to all who wrote to him, and in this particular case, he was outraged by and wanted publicly to rebuke those who endorsed Gandhi's assassination. He was not persuaded that Gandhi was an 'anti-rationalist'. He was so only to 'some extent' and in the weak sense of not regarding knowledge as a value to be pursued for its own sake. Such limitations are common to all human beings and did not detract from Gandhi's greatness.

Kaliol, unrepentant and unpersuaded, wrote back immediately. He accused Einstein of ignorance and bias, and dismissed Gandhi's autobiography as dishonest and hypocritical. He defended Gandhi's assassination, arguing that since the latter's leadership had brought death and destruction to the Hindus, his assassination was no more heinous than if Hitler had been murdered by a Jew. Since his letter

reflects a way of thinking common among some influential Hindu nationalists at the time and even today, it deserves to be quoted in full.

Dear Sir,

I must thank you for your prompt reply, though I must admit, I am very much disappointed by it. You do not know perhaps that the defence statement of the assassin of Gandhi was banned by the Indian Government and whatever reaches to you and the rest of the world, is but one side of the picture. The very fact that the luckless Hindu youth, who killed Gandhi, has been denied the right of being heard, should have pricked your conscience, if your mind had not been biased by relentless anti-Hindu propaganda of Gandhi, Nehru and Co. But not a word of protest against the ban on Gandhi's statement has been uttered by you and I honestly fail to appreciate your siding with one party, without even desiring to know facts from the other.

I do not pretend to support the action of Godse, but I must correct you in your thinking that Godse's murder was committed just because his opponents did not agree with him.

According to his assassin, Gandhi's anti-Hindu attitude was responsible for the murder of thousands of Hindu men, women and children; and whether Gandhi's folly brought this untold havoc on the Hindu nation or his mischievous alliance with their enemies, the fact remains undisputed that his leadership had created circumstances in which a Hindu population, six times the entire Jewish population of Palestine, suffered indescribable miseries. It was to end this wholesale 'genocide' of the Hindus, for the experiments of an irrationalist, innocent of efficient experimentation, that the unfortunate youth staked his own life.

Further, in so far as personal ambition is concerned, Gandhi was different from Hitler only in clothing his inherent vindictiveness behind the smoke-screen of non-violence. You have known Hitler at first hand and we have known this crafty Gandhi similarly. What would be your attitude towards a Jew, if he were to murder Hitler, when he was planning systematic extermination of the Jewish race? Your answer to this question will clarify the issue once and for all. Gandhi was all Hitler, plus hypocrisy, minus rationalism. The former was opaque, the latter transparent—that was all the difference between their make up. Both were 'popular' in exactly the same sense!

Godse and Apte were educationists—like you and me—and were devoted entirely to literary pursuits. But stress of circumstances drove them into politics, much as political event forced you to change your

country. If you really want that truth should prevail, you should demand of the present Gandhian government of India to remove all restrictions from the publication of Godse's statement. Then, after studying both sides, if you condemn Gandhi's assassins, there would be some justification. The very act of suppression of a prisoner's statement should have convinced you that all is not well with the Gandhian government—that Gandhi's popularity is all a hoax. Banning Godse's explanation for murdering Gandhi was an injustice, the like of which was not perpetrated on the Nazis and the Japanese War Criminals by the Allies! And you support it!

My own interest in writing these lines to you is only to bring to your notice that your one-sided pronouncements are being misguided by clever politicians to achieve their own ends. Small but sensible sections of Hindus have failed to appreciate your biased mental attitude towards the luckless Hindu youths, whom a powerful clique had decided to deprive of even whatever credit they deserve.

Should I await a reply?

Yours Sincerely,
Om P. Kaliol

N. B. Writing autobiography is an art, and one who knows it can depict himself as he likes. It does not mean that the actual life of the author is just as he expresses it to be. This is particularly true of Gandhi, who was doubtless, an artful autobiography writer.

Om Prakash

Einstein had had enough and ended the correspondence.

McCarthyism was in full swing in the US in 1953. There was a strong rumour that Einstein might be summoned before the Senate Investigation Committee. In anticipation of it, he threatened in a letter to the *New York Times* that, if that were to happen, he would refuse to cooperate. 'Frankly I can only see the revolutionary way of non-cooperation in the sense of Gandhi's' as the best method of action, and suggested that everyone called before the committee 'ought to refuse to testify'.⁵ He seems to have thought that such non-cooperation affirmed the integrity of those involved, denied legitimacy and assistance to the work of the Senate Investigation Committee, and educated and mobilized the public opinion. It was for him an act of civil disobedience and fully justified in a democracy when the government acted or asked its citizens to act unjustly. Mercifully, the occasion never arose and Einstein's courage and commitment were not put to the test.

When Gene Sharp, who was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for civil disobedience against military conscription, wrote his *Gandhi Wields the Weapon of Moral Power*,⁶ Einstein not only gave him the encouragement and support he badly needed but also wrote a foreword and tried to find him a publisher.

In response to Einstein's letter to the *New York Times*, one professor Walter Harding wrote to him to say that Gandhi's method and ideas were anticipated and influenced by Thoreau, who really deserved the honour Einstein gave to Gandhi. Einstein replied:

Thank you for your letter. I have never read anything by Thoreau, nor am I acquainted with his life history. There are, and have been, many—but not enough—people of independent moral judgement feeling it their duty to resist evil even if sanctioned by state laws.

It may well be that Thoreau has some way influenced Gandhi's thought. But it should not be forgotten that Gandhi's development was something resulting from extraordinary intellectual and moral forces in connection with political ingenuity and an unique situation. I think that Gandhi would have been Gandhi even without Thoreau and Tolstoy.

Einstein explains Gandhi in terms of his unusual intellectual and moral qualities, political acumen, commitment to non-violence, and the situation confronting him. For Einstein, Gandhi could not be explained in terms of any one of these alone but their dynamic interplay. It was possible that Gandhi was influenced by Thoreau and others, but that did not detract from his originality, and the fact remained that they did not discover what he did. What was more, Gandhi's personality including his unwavering commitment to non-violence and powers of resolve, played a vital part in the discovery of his method, and these could not be accounted for in terms of the influence of his predecessors.

In January 1955, the year Einstein died, A.J. Muste of the Fellowship of Reconciliation asked him for a message on Gandhi's death anniversary. Einstein wrote:⁷

Man is born with instinctive impulses and reactions of a contradictory nature, love and the tendency to destruction on the other. Men also interact mutually to influence each other greatly, and this influence is often exerted through individual personalities. In addition to this there is tradition extending over many centuries acting as a powerful stabilizing influence which is decisive in determining whether the social or anti-social forces dominate within any community.

Gandhi was significant as a high point in the bright manifold of historical events, a high point from a moral point of view for which no historical parallels can be easily found. Without the example of the Gandhi/India epoch one could doubt whether a large nation would be capable of being led by the positive social tendencies for long without using external force. The fact that there is such an example to draw on can protect sensible people from demoralization by hopeless pessimism. It is in this that I see the great persisting significance of the Gandhi era.

May your memorial service contribute towards the activation of the striving towards a more satisfactory construction of human society. Your behaviour shows that you are imbued with the idea that small loving, patient steps can bring true success closer.

This was the first time Einstein located Gandhi's new method in a psychological and historical context. For Einstein, man was born with both social and anti-social or constructive and destructive impulses. All societies hitherto have regarded the latter as natural or dominant and built their institutions and practices on that basis. Gandhi broke with this way of thinking, and showed by example that human relations could be organized and injustices addressed by appealing to the principles of cooperation, love, and non-violence. While isolated individuals had sought to live by them in the past, the latter had never been tried at a collective level. If we did not have his example before us, we would not believe that such a thing was even possible. Gandhi's greatness for Einstein lay in liberating the human imagination from the conventional and deeply ingrained ways of thought and offering humankind a new vision and hope.

From 1931 until his death, Einstein retained undiminished admiration for Gandhi and paid him the most generous tributes. He was critical of Gandhi's hostility to modern technology and civilization, but did not think it in any way detracted from his great contribution to human thought and practice. For him, Gandhi's greatness was fourfold. First, just as Newton and Einstein himself had made great discoveries in the field of science, Gandhi had made equally great ones in the moral and political field. Second, Gandhi demonstrated that politics could be a deeply moral activity and free from the usual duplicity, cynicism, and dishonesty. Third, Gandhi's life had a rare consistency and moral grandeur. True to his total commitment to non-violence he ensured that every personal and political action of his conformed to it, so much so that he rejected the protection of the state even when his own life

was in danger and preferred to die for his principle rather than live by the method of violence. Finally, by showing that determined individuals could challenge the powerful forces arrayed against them, Gandhi demonstrated the power of the human will and kept alive the heroic tradition in the modern regimented world.

Einstein's view of Gandhi reflects the familiar fascination of a man of thought for a man of action. He was overwhelmed by Gandhi's resoluteness, will power, moral and physical courage, unshakable determination to live up to his ideals, and the ability to energize and mobilize millions of his fellow men. His view also reflects the intense antipathy to violence and immoral politics that he shared in common with many of his generation. A generation that had witnessed the most horrendous brutality of the Nazis, the fascists, and the communists yearned for a different kind of politics, which Gandhi seemed to offer. It is therefore hardly surprising that Einstein picked out Gandhi's non-violence and moral approach to politics for particular emphasis.

While admiring the great virtues of Gandhi's non-violence, Einstein thought that it worked 'only under certain conditions' and would have failed against the Nazis and other brutal regimes. Martin Buber,⁸ Einstein's friend and Gandhi's admirer, took a similar view. Non-violence required a 'witness' or 'testimony' and that was not possible under a totalitarian regime where there could be no 'martyrdom', only 'pointless death'.⁹ When Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹⁰, who saw in Gandhi a 'reflection of Christ', was asked in 1940 if he would, given the opportunity, assassinate Hitler, he thought for a moment and said, 'Yes'. When all around were rendered 'silent' by the 'powers of the world' and their consciences 'suffocated by the power of hate', a religious individual, acting in full awareness of the presence of God for whom 'he must act and work' and to whom he is ultimately accountable, must be prepared to dirty his hands. Non-violence was a great principle, but it could not be absolutized in a messy world of 'painful choices'. Although Einstein himself never directly addressed the question, the general tenor of his thought suggests that he would have agreed with Bonhoeffer.

This raises two related but separate questions. First, would Gandhi's non-violence have worked against the Nazis and other totalitarian systems? Second, would it have been right to kill Hitler if one had the opportunity to do so? Gandhi answered the first question in the affirmative and the second in the negative; Einstein does the opposite.

I discuss the first question at some length in the following chapter and would like to concentrate on the second here.

Gandhi would not himself kill a human being nor advocate or justify it. If it was done not in cold blood or as a matter of policy but under unbearable pressure by a desperate individual, he would 'condone' or 'understand' it but would nevertheless continue to feel deeply uneasy about it. For him, violence was born of the defeatist and fundamentally false assumption that some human beings were so monstrous and devoid of the basic human impulses as to be beyond the power of suffering love. Confronted with Hitler, it was infinitely better and in the long run far more effective to die in a defiant act of non-violent resistance than to eliminate him by an act of violence. Such a death exposed his inability to bend a determined individual to his will, affirmed the principle of non-violence, might have a transformative effect if not on him then on others associated with him, and would set an inspiring example to future generations.

Although Gandhi has a point, Einstein, Bonhoeffer, and others were right to highlight its limitations. Gandhi's belief that killing a human being including Hitler is always wrong rests on two related mistakes. First, it homogenizes human life. Although all human beings qua human beings deserve respect and none forfeits it altogether and forever, they are expected as human beings to meet a basic set of norms in their relations with each other without which no human society is possible. If their lives and actions fall below this minimal requirement and display what we rightly call inhumanity, they cannot make the same claim to our respect and forbearance as do others. Their deeply damaged humanity has rendered them a grave threat to their fellow humans, and our concern for the latter requires that they should be restrained and, when there is no other alternative, their lives may be taken.

Second, Gandhi fails to appreciate that moral life necessarily involves a plurality of values and cannot be based on one of them alone. Although some of them are more important than others, either in general or in particular contexts, none is wholly inconsequential or of such overriding importance that the rest can all be sacrificed at its altar. Since values conflict, a moral choice has to be made based on their relative weight and the likely consequences of the available alternatives. If Hitler's assassination was likely in one's considered judgement to end or weaken his regime, save human lives, and restore human dignity to

its victims, ruling it out altogether would seem an unacceptable form of moral self-indulgence, the latter because one privileges one's moral purity over the well-being of others and unacceptable because many would continue to die at Hitler's hands whom one could have saved and for whose murder one bears considerable responsibility. While avoiding violence to Hitler, one does it albeit indirectly to his victims. This is one of the paradoxes of non-violence that Gandhi's absolutization of it creates and cannot resolve.

THERE IS MORE TO GANDHI THAN NON-VIOLENCE

As we saw in the previous chapter, many in the West and some even in India believe that Gandhi's greatest contribution consisted in discovering a new method of political action in the form of satyagraha, conventionally translated as non-violent resistance.¹ This reduction of Gandhi to a theorist and practitioner of non-violent resistance is a result of many factors, of which two deserve particular attention. Most of Gandhi's active political life was lived during the interwar period, which witnessed the most brutal forms of violence the world over. European powers in their colonies; fascists in Italy, Spain, and Portugal; Nazis in Germany and Austria; and Stalin in the erstwhile Soviet Union were its most obvious perpetrators. Many writers and artists also celebrated violence, for some of whom it represented a life force and a most authentic form of self-expression. All this provoked a deep revulsion against it and an anguished search for an alternative. Since Gandhi's non-violent movement seemed to offer that alternative, he came to be seen from that perspective.

Second, violence presented a particular challenge to activist Christians who thought that it was their duty to fight against injustice and oppression but found the doctrine of turning the other cheek and loving one's enemy ineffective. They could either fight against injustices and condone or put up with such violence as seemed unavoidable, or rely on moral appeals and exhortations and acquiesce in the injustices that remained unredressed. Gandhi seemed to them to offer a way

out of this moral dilemma. He gave love and non-violence a powerful political articulation, and showed that one could effectively fight against injustice and oppression by non-violent means. His appeal was increased by the twofold fact that since his philosophy and practice of non-violence drew heavily on Christianity, it was intellectually and emotionally accessible to the West, and further that the Christianity that influenced him was closer to its simple original form and free from the theological and institutional baggage that alienated many in the West. Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed this well when he wrote to his grandfather in 1934 that he wanted to go to India to study with Gandhi because Christianity 'has become so westernised and so permeated by purely civilised (or modern) thought that, as we can see, it is almost lost to us'.² Martin Luther King expressed the Christian response to Gandhi well when he said that 'Christ furnished the spirit and motivation while Gandhi furnished the method'.³

Thanks to the way in which Gandhi was appropriated by a highly influential body of Christian and secular writers in the West, a tradition of discourse was built in which he came to be seen primarily as an exponent of non-violence. While this view of Gandhi is not wrong, it is flawed in two important respects. First, it fails to appreciate the specificity of his non-violence, ignores the primacy he assigned to the idea of truth, confuses satyagraha with non-violent resistance that forms only a small part of it, and reduces a comprehensive philosophy of life to a political method. Second, it ignores the fact that there is far more to Gandhi than non-violence and that he has much of value to say about other areas of human life as well. I shall take each in turn.

Philosophy of Non-violence

Gandhi believed that the universe was structured and guided by a cosmic power or intelligence, which, following the common usage, he called God. All life was a manifestation of the divine, and the way to realize God was to identify with and devote oneself to the service of all living beings, especially the humans. Negatively, it involved refraining from causing harm to any living being. Positively, it involved love of them and creating conditions in which they could flourish. Gandhi used the term 'ahimsā' to refer to both. Since the term 'non-violence' tends to stress its negative sense, it does not capture the full meaning of

Gandhi's *ahimsā*, which is best translated as what he called 'active love' or 'active compassion'.

For Gandhi, *ahimsā* was the highest moral principle, and should permeate and structure all aspects of one's life. It was not limited to action, and informed how one thought, felt, judged others, related to them, lived one's life, structured one's social relations, as well as the kind of society one should aim to achieve. It was for him both a personal and a social virtue. To think non-violently was to be open to evidence and argument, not to trap recalcitrant facts into a narrow conceptual grid, to be willing to change one's views, and to 'grow from truth to truth'. It also involved living with the inevitable ambiguities of human life rather than denying or explaining them away in pursuit of certainty, and refusing to freeze the necessarily fluid and dynamic process of thinking into rigid systems of thought. For Gandhi, all such systems imprisoned the human mind within a narrow framework, used the coercive 'force' of logic to bludgeon the intellect into submission, and involved violence. One of his main reasons for insisting that he was not the founder of a new system of thought and that there was nothing called Gandhism was that it denied the autonomy of others and subtly coerced them into thinking and behaving along prescribed lines. He had done nothing more than 'distil' his life's experiences and 'experiments' into a tentative body of ideas in the hope that these would provide others with 'some useful material' in their personal quest for a moral life and which they were to accept only if their experiences confirmed their truth.⁴ Gandhi said that he was not a teacher, a guru, or even a guide but an initiator of a conversation, and sought not followers but fellow seekers.

Just as the votary of non-violence endeavoured to think non-violently, his feelings and emotions too had a non-violent character. Such feelings as hatred and ill will were inherently violent because they wished others harm and encouraged violent actions. They clouded the mind and distorted the individual's ability to view others with objectivity, and were thus unacceptable for epistemological reasons as well. Even the otherwise non-violent feelings of love, compassion, and good will could contain elements of violence. One might seek to mould the loved persons in one's own image, do violence to their natural tendencies, sow in them seeds of internal conflict, and deny their freedom to discover and lead a life of their choice. Non-violent love must be

non-possessive, respect its object's autonomy, and be both engaged and detached.

For Gandhi, to judge others non-violently was to enter into their world of thought, to be charitable in one's understanding of their beliefs and conduct, and to avoid hasty judgement. This did not mean that one should not judge or even criticize them but rather that one's judgment should be grounded in a full understanding of their behaviour and circumstances, be guided by respect for their autonomy and diversity of perspectives, aim at gently suggesting how they had missed out or misconstrued certain aspects of the situation and might try to see it differently, and seek to change them not by negative criticism but by the gentle power of one's example.

A votary of non-violence sees nature not as his property that he may plunder at will but rather as a world of living beings that he should treat with respect. He makes minimum demands on it, takes great care not to disturb its ecological rhythm, and reduces his needs to those necessary for a decent life. He ensures that his relationships with his fellow human beings too are free of exploitation and domination, and seeks nothing for himself that others cannot enjoy as well. Given the subtle ways in which the complex social order makes one an unwitting accomplice in the oppression of others, the votary of non-violence constantly examines his participation in its institutions and practices to ensure that he does not cause harm to others. At a positive level, he identifies with his fellow human beings, loves and cares for them, and endeavours within the limits of his abilities and opportunities to promote their well-being.

For persons committed to what Gandhi called the 'religion of non-violence', it is a way of being in the world, of defining themselves as and seeking to become a certain kind of person. They strive for a world free from subtle and crude forms of violence such as brute force, desire for domination, intellectual and moral dogmatism, political oppression, social injustices, and human degradation. They do not remain silent witnesses to these evils and seek to address them. Such struggles are an integral part, an organic expression, of their chosen way of being in the world, a political articulation of who they are. Their political engagement derives its energy, motivation, and guiding principle from their deepest personal commitments. And the latter in turn are affirmed, tested, and sharpened by their collective action. For Gandhi,

struggles at the personal and political levels are complementary. One cannot personally lead a fully non-violent life in a violent society as the latter impinges on one at many points, structures one's choices, and makes one an unwitting complicit in its violence. Equally, a non-violent society cannot be created and sustained unless its members are committed to leading a life of non-violence. Even as there cannot be an open society made up of closed selves, there cannot be a non-violent society unless its members abjure subtle and crude forms of violence in their personal lives.

Since the votary of non-violence cannot address all injustices, he concentrates on those that are most blatant and about which he is able to do something. He explains why he thinks these are cases of injustice and tries to convince his opponent, be he a private individual or more often those in power. If either party convinces the other, the matter is settled. If his opponent refuses seriously to engage in a dialogue or is otherwise unbending and continues with the injustice, the votary of ahimsā has no choice but to insist on what he believes to be right and mount a satyagraha involving a non-violent struggle. The struggle is non-violent not only because it avoids the use of violence but also because it is conducted in a non-violent spirit. Since the non-violent resister is committed to thinking and feeling non-violently, he is neither dogmatic and self-righteous in his approach to his opponent nor bears hatred and ill will against him. And since he is used to judging non-violently, he listens to his opponent, enters into his world of thought, tries to understand why he fails to see what to others is an obvious injustice, and changes his mind when shown to be wrong. His struggle thus has humility, charity, and the spirit of self-criticism and compromise built into it. Satyagraha is not a rigid and one-sided insistence *on* truth as one sees it but rather a cooperative search *for* it.

The non-violent resister respects the humanity of his opponent; indeed his primary concern is to address and activate it.⁵ He therefore seeks to appeal to his nobler impulses and takes care not to provoke him into anger or acts of violence, which could then be used to embarrass and blackmail him into a compromise. He also respects his opponent's autonomy and integrity and does not seek to coerce him to act against his sincerely held beliefs. His concern is to trigger in his opponent the vitally necessary process of critical self-reflection, to change the way he sees the situation in question, to facilitate open-minded discussion,

and to get him to redress the injustice freely and as an expression of his transformed self-understanding. The aim of the struggle is to deepen their mutual understanding, redefine their relationship, and draw them closer within a reconstituted community.

For Gandhi, human beings are guided by both the head and the heart.⁶ The head refers to reason, while the heart refers to their shared sense of humanity and the resulting fellow feeling and mutual sympathy. Both are often in the grip of narrow self-interest, prejudices, morbid fears, group loyalties, and hatred, and need to be liberated from their influence. For Gandhi, non-violence or 'suffering love' is the only moral way to do so. Moral life in his view has 'its own laws in just the same way that the physical world has',⁷ and the law of love 'will work just as the law of gravitation will work whether we accept it or not'.⁸ The suffering love, suffering voluntarily undergone in pursuit of truth and guided by love, has for him the power to break through the defensive wall the opponent has built around himself and to activate his sense of decency and common humanity. It also acts indirectly by influencing those whose opinion the opponent values and who form his moral milieu. Every individual is part of a moral community, judges himself by its standards, and feels ashamed or at least troubled when his conduct falls short of its expectations. While he might be too obtuse or dogmatic to be moved directly by the suffering of the satyagrahi, others whose judgement he values and good opinion he craves are likely to be more open to moral suasion. This is why Gandhi insists that public opinion is the satyagrahi's greatest ally, and the latter must do all he can to educate and mobilize it.

Although Gandhi insisted on the 'absolute efficacy' of the power of suffering love, his experiences convinced him that this was not so in practice, especially in areas falling outside the narrow sphere of interpersonal relations. Indeed it is difficult to think of even one satyagraha of his in which the suffering love did all the work. Accordingly, he supplemented it by the politically far more potent and realistic idea of non-cooperation, expressed through such diverse forms as economic and social boycott, withdrawal of services, civil disobedience, and non-payment of taxes.

In Gandhi's view, every system of injustice and oppression depended on and was ultimately sustained by the direct or indirect, visible or invisible, willing or unwilling cooperation and support of its victims. They

obeyed its laws; respected its authority; carried out its orders; paid their taxes; suffered their indignities in silence; gave it their loyalty, however grudgingly; joined its police and armed forces; and judged themselves by its values. For Gandhi the oppressive system had no independent power of its own; only the people had it. This was the 'fundamental truth' about the nature and basis of political and indeed all forms of power. By cooperating with the system, its victims gave it both moral legitimacy and the necessary material and coercive resources to secure their compliance. This created the two mutually reinforcing illusions that the victims were themselves powerless and that the system was all-powerful. In Gandhi's view, shattering these illusions was one of the main objectives of the non-violent struggle. The struggle both empowered the people by activating their sense of agency and opening up new channels of collective action, and weakened the system by denying it moral and material support, undermining its self-confidence and demonstrating its fragility.

Gandhi's non-violence, as I have briefly outlined it, was not just or even primarily a method of political action but a way of being in the world, a mode of discovering and leading the 'life of truth'. Its theory and practice drew on several moral and religious traditions. Its uniqueness consisted in the manner in which it combined their various elements into a reasonably coherent though not entirely tension-free whole. From the Hindu tradition, it derived part of its vocabulary such as *ahimsā*, *satya*, and *satyagraha*, and such beliefs as oneness of all life, identity of fundamental human interests, and an immanentist and impersonal view of God. From Christianity, it derived the ideas of active love, service of fellow men, suffering, and martyrdom. Even the idea of resistance seems to have Christian origins. It has no analogue in the Hindu thought and practice where those feeling unjustly treated left the area, immolated themselves, or went on fast rather than stand up to their opponent. The traditional Christian view of resistance that influenced Gandhi was, however, largely passive, and he gave it an active orientation.

Gandhi also drew heavily on the modern liberal tradition, especially its ideas of personal autonomy, moral integrity, equality, individual liberty, rational persuasion, and intellectual openness, but he departed from it in important respects. He valued rational discussion but saw its limits and the need for struggle. He emphasized the importance of

compromise and found the ideas of J.S. Mill and especially John Morley particularly illuminating. Gandhi, however, thought that liberal compromise was a form of bargaining, give and take, and did not involve genuine persuasion and meeting of minds. It encouraged the parties concerned to make exaggerated initial demands and hence involved a measure of dishonesty. It did not probe the deeper causes of dispute, lift the parties to a higher level of mutual understanding, or have a transformative effect on them. Since compromise was common to both liberalism and satyagraha, Morley's *On Compromise*⁹ was widely discussed among Gandhi's associates. Some of them including Kishorelal Mashruwala, one of his most perceptive commentators, wrote about it and Mahadev Desai even translated it into Gujarati under the suggestive title of *Satyagrahani Maryādā* (Limits of Satyagraha). Although Gandhi's non-violence went beyond liberal reason, it valued and took its bearings from it.

Born out of a creative integration of elements drawn from several premodern and modern traditions and refined in the crucible of personal and political struggles, Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence has a distinct character. This becomes clear when we see how much it differs from the modern ways of understanding and organizing the moral and political life. The latter separates the personal and the political; and at a different level, the private and the public. For Gandhi, the two are inseparable and form a unity. Modernity values structured and systematized thought; Gandhi stresses its inherent fluidity and ambiguity. Modernity cherishes neatly demarcated individuals occupying clearly designated and legally protected spaces; Gandhi sees them as overlapping selves living within shared moral spaces. Modernity relies on rules to regulate relations between otherwise isolated individuals, and its view of morality has an impersonal and bureaucratic orientation. For Gandhi, morality is contextual, individualized, and involves a sensitive and situationally nuanced realization of an ideal. Modernity sees love as basically a private emotion and gives it no political role. For Gandhi, it is central to political life and forms its driving force. Modernity has a rationalist thrust and privileges reason over all other human faculties. Gandhi seeks to unite reason and emotion, the head and the heart, and appeals to the whole person. Modernity is logocentric and relies heavily on explicit verbal communication. For Gandhi, the suffering love and the actions and lives of inspirational individuals exert a 'silent'

and 'invisible' force that transcends conscious calculation. Gandhi's philosophy of life is neither premodern nor postmodern neither liberal nor anti-liberal, but in a class by itself, and so is the non-violence that grows out of it.¹⁰

Non-violence after Gandhi

After Gandhi's death, non-violent political action inspired by him had a complex history in India and elsewhere. India was now a democracy, and Gandhi's followers wondered about its role and limits. Vinoba Bhave, Gandhi's valued colleague, argued that the Gandhian kind of 'negative satyāgraha' that involved political mobilization and resistance had no place in a democracy. Since people possessed the electoral and other means of exerting pressure, moral persuasion was the only legitimate way to redress glaring evils. He removed even the reference to 'fighting injustice' in the pledge taken by the members of his Bharatiya Shanti Sena on the grounds that it sounded aggressive, and that injustice was not easy to define and agree upon. Bhave concentrated his energy on the rural poor and relied on moral appeals to secure land redistribution. Since his Bhoodan Movement was highly personalized, moralistic in its orientation, and lacked organization, discipline, and a long-term strategy, it petered out after achieving some initial success.

After supporting Bhave for a while, J.P. Narayan, who had a far better understanding of Gandhi, broke with him. In his view, satyagraha of the Gandhian type had an important role in a democracy because there was no reason to believe that there would either be no injustice and oppression in it or that it could be redressed by moral appeals. J.P. led or inspired several successful movements but made a grave error of judgement when, in a mood of intense frustration, he called for a 'total revolution' and declared a virtual war on the corrupt and authoritarian government of Indira Gandhi. Unlike Mahatma Gandhi, he had not trained a cadre of committed workers or cultivated grass-roots support and relied on a floating mass of volatile students to spearhead his movement. He also lacked a clearly worked out set of concrete objectives around which to mobilize the people and negotiate with the government, and took a naively populist and anti-state stand. Not surprisingly, his movement took an aggressive and intolerant form, and played into the hands of a determined and ruthless government.

Since injustices persist in India, national and local struggles have continued to be mounted against the government and local opponents. Some are violent and clearly un-Gandhian; some others are rightly suffused with anger, hatred, frustration, and aggression—the only thing Gandhian about them is that they generally tend to avoid physical violence; a few are peaceful, disciplined, and well organized but often lack tenacity, mass mobilization, and a well worked out programme of action. Anna Hazare's fast, which received a great deal of national attention, attracted onlookers but not active participants, did not spread beyond Delhi, and generated no mass movement. By and large, the great tradition of satyagraha that Gandhi had established over three decades and in which he had trained his countrymen leads a shadowy life in modern India, surviving in collective memory, inspiring a few isolated groups but not an effective political force.

Gandhi once remarked that African Americans were most likely to carry his non-violence forward. The civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. came fairly close to Gandhi's idea of a truly non-violent struggle. His principled commitment to non-violence, belief in the power of suffering love, emphasis on gradualism and compromise, mass mobilization around carefully selected and suitably dramatized issues, measured language, and respect for his opponent were all Gandhian.¹¹ Since his philosophy of life, historical context, and goals, and his country's moral and political tradition were different, he departed from Gandhi in several important respects. Although his commitment to non-violence was principled and not based on purely pragmatic or tactical considerations, he limited it to politics and had little interest in it as a comprehensive philosophy of life that it was for Gandhi. He rejected Gandhi's insistence on a simple life of minimum needs and enjoyed life's pleasures to the full. He disapproved of the fast as a form of political action, which for Gandhi represented a 'voluntary crucifixion of the flesh'¹² and was an indispensable tool in the armoury of a votary of non-violence. King took a non-elitist view of non-violent struggle and saw no need for a group of morally and politically trained workers to lead the movement. His Southern Christian Leadership Conference did hold seminars to help prepare the non-violent resisters involved in marches, boycotts, prayer vigils, and civil disobedience, but these were not training centres.

Although they were familiar with Gandhi in different degrees, most of the leaders of non-violent protests in Poland, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines, and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s either drew their inspiration from Martin Luther King and his better known civil rights movement or developed their own home-grown strategies. With the exception of their religious leaders, most had no principled commitment to non-violence and largely took a pragmatic view of it. They had no interest in Gandhi's idea of activating the shared humanity of the opponent and no faith in the power of suffering love. Their goals were largely political, such as how to topple an oppressive regime or regain a stolen election rather than winning over their opponent and creating a community on a new moral basis. What these movements shared in common with Gandhi were their avoidance of violence, mass mobilization, assertion of people's power, and reliance on the pressure of domestic and international public opinion. Lacking a personal and collective commitment to *satya* in his wide usage of the term, they were basically forms of non-violent resistance rather than *satyagrahas*. Although not Gandhian in their aspirations and philosophical basis, they bore enough family resemblance to it to fall within the same broad tradition.

Conditions of Success

In the previous section, I analysed Gandhi's theory and practice of non-violence and distinguished it from others. A study of his movements and those that followed it suggests that the success of a non-violent struggle depends on a number of factors, of which the following five are most important.¹³ The suffering love that Gandhi emphasized plays a part but not often, not on its own, and not to the degree he stressed.

First, as Gandhi himself observed on several occasions, the pressure of domestic and to a lesser extent international public opinion is crucial. As he put it, '[a] *satyāgrahi* must first mobilise public opinion against the evil which he is out to eradicate. Awakened and enlightened opinion is the most potent weapon of a *satyāgrahi*.'¹⁴ And again, 'public opinion is a mightier force than that of the gunpowder'.¹⁵ A *satyagrahi* should take up an issue whose importance is recognized by public opinion, take a stand of whose justice he is confident of convincing it, and in general take care not to be too far out of step with it.

In any situation of conflict, there is generally a large body of uncommitted people who have not yet made up their mind, and are waiting to see how the struggle would turn out and affect their interests before taking a stand. It is vital for the non-violent movement to win them over.¹⁶ Even so far as those in government and their active and passive supporters in the wider society are concerned, they rarely form a homogeneous group. They have their internal differences of opinion and conflicts of interest, and their commitment to the system varies greatly in its degree and intensity. Non-violent struggle needs to identify and exploit these differences, concentrate on those groups that are not blindly committed to the system, and win them over by appealing to their moral sense and wider interests. Those in charge of the prevailing system have a vested interest in creating the illusion that they and their supporters are all united and determined at all cost to defend it. Non-violent struggle must avoid and dispel this illusion.¹⁷

Second, which is closely related to the first, non-violent struggle depends for its success on mass mobilization. The larger the number of individuals and groups it attracts and brings into the public sphere, the greater is its political momentum, moral authority, and ability to win over the waverers and limit the government's range of options. Mass mobilization is a complex process.¹⁸ It involves identifying different interests and points of view and building relatively stable and disciplined coalitions led by individuals commanding broad-based grass-roots support. The objectives of the movement should be general enough to win the broad support of different groups, yet concrete enough to reflect their distinct concerns. Since a non-violent movement aims to energize the masses and demands sacrifices from them, it needs to speak in an inspirational vernacular language that resonates with their cultural tradition.

Third, non-violent struggle should not lose sight of the fact that part of its strength is derived from its concern to introduce a moral perspective on political life. While it should not naively sacrifice lives and suffer police brutality out of a misguided belief in the absolute efficacy of suffering love or in a spirit of moral superiority, it should not become an ordinary form of struggle relying on pressure and militancy, and only differing from it in eschewing violence. It should aim to lift the conflict to a higher level, be led by men and women commanding moral authority across the political divide, mobilize public opinion

around the best traditions and values of the wider society, show respect for the opponent, and be measured in its language and demands.

Fourth, while a non-violent movement should be realistic enough to put up with isolated acts of violence by desperate individuals provoked beyond endurance as Gandhi himself came to appreciate, it should express its disapproval of them and disavow violence as a general policy. Violence compromises its moral stature and allows the state to legitimize its counter-violence in the name of maintaining law and order, and to divert attention from the issues involved. By contrast, non-violence, adopted either as a principle or more realistically as a policy, delegitimizes state repression, reassures the neutral public that social stability is not at stake, and keeps the public opinion focussed on the injustices involved. It exposes the inevitable differences among the supporters of the system and weakens their capacity for concerted action. It encourages defections from the armed forces that are unlikely to want to shoot people who mean them no harm and who may include their friends, relations, kinsmen, and neighbours. And it also counters the government's standard tactic of whipping up a nationalist hysteria and impugning the patriotic loyalty of its critics.

Finally, like all struggles but more so than others, a non-violent struggle has a greater chance of success if it is sensitive to the interests of the opponent and accommodates them in the new arrangement. If the opponent saw no future for himself, he would have no reason to compromise. He would fight to the end, unleash great brutality, and leave a legacy on which a stable and harmonious society could not be built. Unlike other forms of struggle, non-violent struggle is concerned with not only winning certain concessions but also restructuring the pattern of relations between conflicting groups and reconstituting the society on a just basis. It should not therefore see accommodation and compromise as a painful necessity or a pardonable betrayal of the cause but should rather positively welcome them as expressions of mutual good will and a basis for greater future cooperation.

Non-violent resisters need to establish direct contact with their opponent, keep the channels of communication open, avoid demonizing or humiliating him, and build a relationship of trust with him. They should have a clear set of objectives, be willing to compromise on non-essentials, and should never forget that after the struggle is over, they have to live together with their opponent in reasonable

amity. Although non-violent resistance does not rule out mediation and arbitration, their role is limited to facilitating communication and negotiation between the parties involved. The latter must directly talk to each other, feel the impact of each other's emotions and experiences, learn to work together, and in the process come closer. The purpose of the struggle is not just to settle the conflict but also to trigger the vital process of inner change in and unite the adversaries on a new basis. A third-party mediation cannot by itself achieve this.

The spirit of compromise is evident in many successful non-violent movements either by design or in response to the inherent logic of non-violence. All of Gandhi's satyagrahas welcomed and ended in compromise, sometimes going much further than was necessary and causing great disappointment among his colleagues and followers. The Solidarity leaders in Poland accommodated the communists. Although they were sometimes rightly criticized for being 'too soft' on the latter, they were able to avoid a brutal response and effect a relatively smooth transition to a multi-party democracy. In Portugal's 'Revolution of the Carnations', Mámrio Soares made concessions to the supporters of the old regime and ended half a century of right-wing dictatorship without bloodshed. Nelson Mandela took care not to humiliate and dispossess the white South Africans, and was helped by Bishop Tutu and others who challenged their reading of their religion. Some of his supporters and critics thought, perhaps rightly, that he was too accommodating, but even they acknowledged that a violent backlash by a bitter and deeply alienated white community would have destroyed all hope of a stable South Africa.

Although democracy is more hospitable to non-violent struggle, it is not its necessary condition. The British rule in India was not democratic. The Polish regime against which the Solidarity movement successfully campaigned for reform was a dictatorship, as were the Hungarian, Romanian, Ukrainian, and other regimes where non-violent resistance chalked up considerable success. In East Germany, even the brutal regime of Erich Honecker could not stop mass rallies in East Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, and other cities from which arose a powerful cry, 'We are the people'. The Shah of Iran was toppled not by an armed insurgency but by demonstrations, peaceful protests, boycotts, and civil disobedience undertaken by well-organized ordinary citizens, initially acting on their own and later led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Tunisia and

Egypt were both dictatorships but could not stop and were eventually toppled by peaceful protests.

It has often been asked whether non-violence would have worked in totalitarian societies such as Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. Martin Buber, the distinguished Jewish philosopher who was otherwise sympathetic to Gandhi, did not think so. As he wrote to Gandhi, martyrdom or Gandhi's suffering love required a witness or what Gandhi called enlightened public opinion, and presupposed an open society in which news and views circulated freely. If a figure like Gandhi had appeared in Nazi Germany, he and his followers would have been eliminated before anyone ever got to hear about them, and their movement would have died before it was even born.¹⁹

Buber had a point. Non-violent resistance would have had no impact in the extermination camps and even perhaps outside them once Hitler was firmly in power, and such limited success as it might have had would have been secured at a considerable cost in human lives. Gandhi was wrong to think otherwise, and incredibly naive to imagine that Hitler's heart could be 'melted' by the moral appeals and suffering love of his victims. However, the situation is rarely as stark as this. Hitler did not spring up overnight. He took years to consolidate his regime, build his party, perfect his military machine, brainwash ordinary Germans, and acquire a stranglehold over public mind, and that was the time to act. During that period, large sections of German citizens were confused, undecided, positively hostile to Hitler, or broadly supportive of his objectives but opposed to his methods. Sections of the military and the police, especially in the upper echelons, had a strong sense of professional honour, and were opposed to killing and arresting their fellow citizens in response to arbitrary government orders. The outside world knew what was going on in Germany, and the German public had sources of independent information and opportunities for mass mobilization.

The situation in Germany was no doubt extremely difficult. Hitler's long-term objectives kept changing and were not easy to ascertain; the violence unleashed by his followers was brutal; and many Germans smarting under humiliation and suffering from hyperinflation yearned for a strong and authoritarian government. However, it would be wrong to rule out the possibility of effective non-violent resistance altogether. Gandhi had a point when he wrote to Buber that 'no man can be

turned into a permanent machine', and that once the dead weight of propaganda and government manipulation was lifted, he could be helped to 'function normally'.²⁰ The Nazis were sensitive to the domestic and even international public opinion. That was why they kept the extermination camps a top secret, took great care to ensure that their neighbourhoods and even the wives and families of the camp commandants remained in the dark about what was going on there, and resorted to elaborate lies when the news occasionally leaked out. One wonders what would have happened if hundreds of thousands of Germans in the early and mid-1930s had protested, occupied public squares, engaged in civil disobedience, refused to cooperate with the regime, and dared it to do its worst.²¹

Although one should not underestimate the extent to which the Nazis were prepared to go and generalize from limited examples, some idea of the power of massive non-violent resistance can be obtained by looking at such acts of resistance as did take place in Germany itself and the Nazi occupied countries. Non-violent demonstrations by German wives against the imprisonment of their Jewish husbands in Berlin led to talks and their release. Non-violent resistance against the Nazis in Norway and Denmark saved many Jewish lives. Non-cooperation in Denmark in the form of strikes and work slowdowns severely hampered the German attempt to acquire complete control over the country. Indeed it would seem that the Nazi military machine was deeply perplexed as to how to deal with non-violent forms of resistance. B.H. Liddel Hart, a British military strategist who interviewed Nazi generals after the war, put the point well: 'They were experts in violence, and had been trained to deal with opponents who used that method. But other forces of resistance baffled them.... It was a relief to them when resistance became violent and when non-violent forms were mixed with guerrilla action, thus making it easier to combine drastic suppressive action against both at the same time.'²²

More Than Non-violence

In the previous sections, I discussed the distinctive character of Gandhi's non-violence and showed why it should not be confused with movements that avoid violence but are quite different in their moral basis and objectives. I shall now turn to the next question of what more

there is to Gandhi than non-violence. He offers profound insights into several areas of life such as the nature of political power, the mechanism by which an unjust system maintains itself, the ways in which ordinary men and women can be complicit in their own oppression, subtle forms of violence, the ethics of citizenship, how to fashion a personal and collective identity that is both open and embedded, the nature of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, and so on. I shall briefly discuss some of these by way of illustration.

In a globalizing and rapidly changing world, the question of identity acquires considerable salience. Thanks to the constant flow of new ideas and currents of thought as well as the need to adjust to changing circumstances, the inherited ethnic, cultural, religious, and political identities come under pressure. They become blurred, fuzzy, unstable, and fail to perform their traditional role of providing moral and emotional anchors and a sense of belonging. Their bearers feel disoriented, rootless, and fragmented, and wonder who they are; what, if anything, they stand for; where they belong; and how they can lead whole and meaningful lives. Some panic, resist all change, and nostalgically yearn for non-existing certainties. Others equally naively imagine that their identities are infinitely pliable and that they can make of themselves what they will. In their own different ways, both responses are incoherent and self-defeating. Gandhi offers a more sensible alternative.

For Gandhi, human beings need stability, continuity, and a moral compass in their lives, and that is provided by their cultural community. They are also, however, constantly confronted with the challenges presented by changes in their self-understanding, circumstances, and the world around them. While change cannot be avoided, it cannot be uncritically embraced either, and requires a discriminating response. And while a socially grounded identity is necessary for a sense of continuity and belonging, it cannot be frozen and preserved like an item in a museum. Individuals need to reflect critically on their identity, examine whether and what changes are needed in it, and refashion themselves without losing their bearings. Identity for Gandhi is both inherited and created, neither a fixed entity nor a matter of unreflective choices but a carefully calibrated process of judicious self-creation.²³

This is how he responds to the challenge of the multicultural world. He sees other cultures neither as threats to be avoided nor as consumer goods to pick and choose as one pleases but rather as conversational

partners. For him, every cultural community represents a particular vision of the good life and has its characteristic strengths and weaknesses. Since one loves and cares for one's community, one wants it to be the best it is capable of and has a duty to criticize and reform its unacceptable beliefs and practices. Such a critical engagement with it is facilitated by a dialogue with other cultural communities whose different visions of the good life provide a critical perspective on one's own. For Gandhi, other cultural communities do not represent 'the other'; rather they are central to one's critical interaction with one's own and contribute to one's growth. Gandhi expressed this idea by invoking the suggestive metaphor of living in a house with its windows wide open. The house provides a home, a sense of rootedness, and a familiar and stable framework. Its open windows locate it in and constantly remind its occupants of the wider world lying beyond it, and bring in new and vitalizing currents of thought. For Gandhi, one has the confidence to welcome and experiment with the new when one is rooted and does not fear being overwhelmed by it.²⁴ He sees religious diversity in similar terms and shows how to respond to it in a creative and constructive manner.

Gandhi gave a good deal of thought to how a votary of non-violence should conceptualize and relate to his political community. Although he sometimes used the terms 'nationalism' and 'patriotism' because of their widespread currency and familiarity, he was unhappy with them and either invested them with new meanings or offered an alternative vocabulary. Nationalism and patriotism reified the nation and the state respectively, and turned them into entities transcending their members and possessing independent interests of their own. They were exclusive and militarist, monopolized the moral lives of their members, dulled their critical faculties, and justified egregious violence in the name of national glory, interest, or honour. As we saw in an earlier chapter, Gandhi preferred to talk of *prajāprem* (love of one's people) or *swadeshi bhāvanā* (attachment to one's community). People were at the centre of all politics, and the sole purpose of political power was to promote the twin goals of *swarāj* (restoring power to the people) and *sarvodaya* (well-being or moral growth of all). For Gandhi, one could not be said to love one's country unless one loved and deeply cared for every one of its citizens, including and especially the lowest and the worst off.²⁵ Like all other forms of love, *prajāprem*

was necessarily critical. It involved cherishing what was valuable in one's way of life and removing what was unacceptable. It is striking that Gandhi who deeply loved his countrymen was also their severest critic. Since they knew that he cared for them and had no other interest than their well-being at heart, they took his criticisms seriously, were pained by the pain their misdeeds and lapses caused him, and sought to reform themselves.

Gandhi was more than the totality of his ideas and actions, and they cannot be the sole basis of our judgement of him. We also need to look at the kind of life he led, the principles and passions it exemplified, and the example he set. During his early years in South Africa, he committed himself to a life of truth and non-violence. With no model to emulate and manual of instructions to follow, he had to work out the details of his way of life himself by means of what he called 'experiments in truth', a perfectly clear and valid project that Perry Anderson in his *Indian Ideology* takes to imply rejection of the idea of truth itself and totally misunderstands. Gandhi was not sure whether as a lawyer he should defend what he knew to be false or ask his client to confess the truth, whether he should encourage the litigants to settle the conflict between them or let them fight it out in the court, whether he should vigorously cross-examine the witnesses and discredit them even when he knew they were telling the truth. He wondered how to raise and run his family and balance their claims against those of public life, how to speak the truth without being offensive and disagreeable, how to simplify his life and devote himself to the service of his fellow humans, and what loyalty to the empire required of a votary of non-violence in a situation of military conflict. He experimented with his food habits, pattern of social relations, manner of speaking, sex life, ways of treating people, and modes of thought to ensure that they embodied and promoted the values of truth and non-violence.²⁶ Since new situations threw up new dilemmas and called for new responses, Gandhi's moral quest was unrelenting and unending.

At a deeper level, Gandhi saw a profound connection between violence and the fear of death and thought that a life committed to non-violence involved conquering that fear. Violence worked because people were deeply attached to life and afraid of death. And conversely, it was this fear that led them to seek security in the state's apparatus of violence and wars. For Gandhi, the traditional, especially the modern

political thought, took the fear of death as its foundational principle and used it to justify the institutionalized violence of the modern state.

Gandhi's non-violence sought to break this cycle by basing itself on a different foundational principle. A man committed to it valued life and wished to live, but he was not so attached to life that that he would do so at all cost. He did not threaten violence and play on his opponent's fear of death, nor did he abandon his fight for justice under threat of death. For him, life was an opportunity to pursue great values such as human dignity and justice, not a possession to be jealously guarded against real and imaginary threats. From a violence-based perspective, death signified powerlessness and finality. From that of non-violence, it continued one's life's work by exercising a silent and invisible influence on one's opponent, others, and future generations through the principles it affirmed, the manner of one's death, and the example one set. This is how Gandhi understood the power of martyrdom, including the crucifixion of Christ. Since the non-violent man was not afraid of death and saw it as the continuation of his life's work, he approached life with rare freedom. As Gandhi put it, life 'becomes liveable only to the extent that death is treated as a friend, never as an enemy'.²⁷ On another occasion he remarked, the 'art of dying follows as a corollary from the art of living'.²⁸

Those committed to non-violence needed to master the art of dying. 'As it is, all die but one has to learn by practice how to die a beautiful death', a death that 'ennobles' the agent, 'morally enriches' the world by its example and sacrifice, bears a permanent testimony to the value of one's ideals, and is 'never wasted'.²⁹ Gandhi faced several threats to his life from his days in South Africa onwards, about ten depending on how one defines them. Afraid of death, he initially sought protection and security. Over time, he not only conquered his fear but turned dying into an art and death into an act of self-expression, as became evident during the last few years of his life. In July 1944, when he had gone to Panchagini to recuperate from a bout of malaria, Godse went there to kill him. He was overpowered and his dagger taken away from him. When Gandhi was informed, he asked Godse to stay with him for a week to discuss their differences. Godse refused, whereupon Gandhi, not in the least worried about the likely recurrence of the incident, let him go.³⁰ He returned four years later to finish the job. In 1946 and 1947, Gandhi toured violence-affected areas without police

protection, braved the intense anger and revengefulness of the victims, and urged them with considerable success to forgive the killers of their loved ones. When in 1947 Madanlal dropped a bomb at one of his prayer meetings, Gandhi carried on and chided the audience for being frightened of a 'mere bomb'. A better example of confronting violent death with equanimity and calm courage is difficult to find.

Gandhi saw life as an unending moral voyage, an adventure in self-creation. 'My life is my message', he remarked on many occasions, and insisted that his writings were to be read and his actions understood against the background of the life he had chosen to lead. The story of how a timid, diffident, patriarchal, and moderately talented Mohandas, suffering from a deep sense of racial inferiority, transformed himself through great personal struggle into a Mahatma, free from all traces of racial, sexist, and national prejudices, and inventing and practising a new kind of politics, is an abiding source of inspiration.

In spite of his many intellectual limitations, serious political misjudgements, some strange beliefs and fads, and an unduly optimistic view of the power of non-violence, Gandhi's life and thought have the resources to illuminate contemporary problems and perplexities. They show that it is possible to be religious without falling prey to fundamentalism, draw political inspiration from religion without weakening one's commitment to a secular state, marry tradition and reason, think and act both locally and globally, to be a disciplined member of an organization without losing one's freedom of thought and action, and so on. Even so far as concrete situations are concerned, Gandhi's life and thought can provide a fresh perspective on them.

We might take the case of the Babri mosque that has agonized Indians since Independence. Various approaches have been tried without success such as recourse to the courts and cross-party talks. One might ask what a Gandhian approach would be like. Some have suggested that Gandhi would have asked Muslims to show goodwill and generosity by giving up their claim to the mosque and allowing Hindus to build their temple on the site. I doubt if this would have found favour with him. He had no interest in temples built from bricks and mortar. As he used to say, one carries Rama within oneself and needs no temples to worship him. Furthermore, asking Muslims to make such a gesture implies that they are in some significant way linked to or accountable for the actions of those who might have destroyed the temple several

centuries ago and built the mosque on its ruins. Gandhi had no sympathy for such a dubious view of moral and political responsibility. More importantly, the past had no interest for him except in so far as it was relevant to a better present and future. To brood over it was to remain imprisoned within it and forfeit one's freedom to forge a new future.

Gandhi would see the Babri mosque not as a dispute between the two communities but rather as a matter *for* the Hindus. It is not itself a problem. Some groups of Hindus have made it one, and its resolution lies in persuading them to re-examine their attitude. The mosque exists and has existed for some time. To want to destroy other people's religious buildings is to show intolerance, which is not only unacceptable but also inconsistent with what Gandhi took to be the Hindu tradition of tolerance. Furthermore, once one goes down the road of redressing past acts of real or imaginary injustice, one cannot stop with one mosque, and this generates an unending cycle of violence. Gandhi would urge Hindus to leave the Babri mosque and other disputed religious buildings alone, and forge bonds of goodwill and trust with Muslims.

If some groups of Hindus insisted on destroying the mosque as they did in 1992, he would see it as an indelible stain on the Hindu conscience and pit all his considerable authority against it. He would ask his carefully chosen associates to join him in offering their personal protection to the mosque, as he had himself offered to Muslim families in Noakhali, Bihar, Delhi, and elsewhere, and dare the fanatics to do their worst. He would particularly encourage the participation of women whose courage and commitment to non-violence he highly valued and whose services he had sought in troubled regions. He might even have undertaken a penitential fast and patiently diffused the Hindu anger and hatred that it might have provoked. He might have failed and fallen victim to a *karsevak*'s bullet or brick. He would have thought this a small price to pay for saving the honour of his religion and the good name of his country, both of which he loved more than his own life.

While this is one possible Gandhian response to the 'problem' of the Babri mosque, there could be others. After all, Gandhi was endlessly inventive and might have come up with a wholly new approach. Gandhi also has something to say about the other agonizing questions of contemporary India such as rampant corruption, gross misuse of

public office, and exploitation of tribal communities, as well as such global questions as alternatives to capitalism, international justice, the environment, and rooted cosmopolitanism.³¹ It is only to be expected that some of his answers will not work, seem right, or might be based on a way of thinking we would wish to discourage. In exploring a Gandhian perspective on a subject, our concern rather is to make him our conversational partner, liberate our imagination from the grip of old and tired ways of thought, and use Gandhi to help us go beyond him.

GANDHI AND OSAMA BIN LADEN

Is a Dialogue Possible?*

An influential and sometimes militarily highly effective body of Islamic militants, broadly inspired by and sharing many of the ideas and activities of Osama bin Laden, has haunted the West for the past few years and is in its current or new forms likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future. It has a large and clear political and moral agenda—to end the Western economic and political interference in the internal affairs of Muslim societies, to counter what it takes to be its sinister moral influence, and to rebuild these societies and hopefully the rest of the world on truly Islamic principles. It feels convinced that there is no other way to achieve this objective than to engage in violent, even terrorist, activities, to which the West has responded with a massive violence of its own, generating an apparently endless cycle of destruction. Although bin Laden is now dead, he gave Islamic militancy an unmistakable human face and a powerful global presence, and hence I shall use him in this chapter as its symbol and spokesman. Although my ‘bin Laden’ draws on the real individual with that name, it is basically an intellectual construct representing a particular way of thinking and acting.

*This chapter is an extensively revised version of ‘Mahatma Gandhi and Osama bin Laden: An Imaginary Dialogue’, *The Stranger’s Religion: Fascination and Fear*, ed. Anna Lännström (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

Since the current cycle of violence is deeply worrying, I explore what, if anything, Mahatma Gandhi would have to say on the subject. He was a great theorist and practitioner of non-violence and had considerable experience of dealing with situations of conflict. Like bin Laden, he too was a critic of Western civilization, a deeply religious person, challenged the greatest imperialist power of his time, and strove to regenerate his decadent society, thus sharing enough in common to understand bin Laden's anxieties, ambitions, and concerns, and likely to have greater influence on him than a conventional liberal or secular interlocutor. I set up an imaginary dialogue between the two as the best way to elucidate their respective perspectives, and explore the limits of both the Gandhian form of non-violence and more generally of rational discussion.

To avoid misunderstanding, two points of clarification are necessary. First, there is a common tendency to dismiss Islamic militants as a bunch of mad and murderous people, irrational fanatics devoid of decency and good sense, with whom no dialogue is possible. Such a view dehumanizes them, denies their basic human capacity for rational thought, and does them injustice. It also conveniently absolves us from the responsibility to understand why they think and act the way they do, and to deal with such grievances as they might have against us. Indeed it removes all moral limits on our actions and allows us to put them down with all the force at our command with a clear conscience. In denying their humanity, we risk losing our own. In this chapter I treat them as rational and responsible human beings, enter into their world of thought, and give as coherent and sympathetic an account of it as an outsider could. By respecting their humanity in this way, we not only affirm our own but also stand a good chance of encouraging them to become our dialogical partners.¹

Second, unlike the relatively tidy philosophical dialogue in which one can examine and debate each argument separately, a political dialogue is messy, multilayered, and holistic. One's view of human beings, moral values, personal experiences, and historical memories define why one sees a particular situation in a certain way, give greater weight to one factor rather than another, explain how one connects events and why one considers one kind of action better than another. I therefore begin by setting out at some length bin Laden's general view of the world as a necessary background to why he interprets and responds to situations in certain ways.

Dear Mahatma Gandhi,

Ever since my followers attacked the US embassy in Kenya, the USS Cole in Yemen, the World Trade Center in New York, and the Pentagon in Washington DC, they and I have been declared enemies of the civilized world and hunted, tortured, and killed like wild animals.² I was not surprised by the reaction of the US, especially that of the Republican administration, as I expected nothing better of those who wish to dominate the world by force and are determined to put down anyone daring to challenge their evil designs. But I was dismayed by the reactions of liberals and radicals in the US, Europe, and elsewhere, and also by those of my fellow Muslims. I owe them an explanation of why we did what we did, will do so again, and remain unmoved by the calumnies heaped upon us.³

Islam is a great religion—continuous with and complementing the other two Abrahamic faiths. It accepts Judaism and Christianity as true religions, reveres their prophets and has always been tolerant and respectful of them. Thanks to the moral and spiritual appeal of its profound truths, it was quickly able to win over the allegiance of hundreds of thousands of people in different parts of the world. It inspired its followers with such zeal and fervour that their armies chalked up conquests against all odds, a miracle that could only have occurred with Allah's blessings, and today it has become the second largest and the fastest-growing religion. Christians, who have long been jealous of its appeal and resentful of its influence, tried to discredit and undermine it by mocking its beliefs, vilifying its prophet, and mounting crusades against it. Islam survived all these and built large empires, the great Ottoman Empire being the last.

With the rise of modernity, Britain, France, and other European countries began to industrialize and form themselves into strong and militarily powerful nation states. Driven by the lust for power and profit on which their civilization is based, they conquered large parts of the world, built vast empires, and set about reshaping their colonies and other countries in their image. Since Muslim societies had betrayed their religious principles and became corrupt and degenerate, they fell an easy prey. Being infinitely better armed, the British and the French overwhelmed the Ottoman Empire, broke it up into artificial political units, set up corrupt rulers, played them off against each other, and used them to consolidate and perpetuate their hegemony. After the Second World War, they divided Palestine, handed over large parts of it to the Jews, and created a lasting and festering source of injustice in the shape of Israel. Muslim societies have always included large Jewish communities and protected them. But giving the Jews their own state at the

expense of the Palestinians, and that too right in the heart of the Arab world, was a highly provocative and grossly unjust act.

When the US replaced the weakened Europeans in the 1950s as a global hegemon, it resorted to covert colonization and designed a more subtle empire of its own. In the name of defending the 'free world' against the Soviet threat, it set up and supported puppet regimes in many parts of the world, including and especially the Middle East upon whose oil it had come to depend for its survival and prosperity. It was even more partial to Israel than the Europeans, devoting much of its foreign aid budget to it, arming it, encouraging its expansionist ambition, and defending even its most outrageous deeds. The collapse of the Soviet Union gave the US an illusion of omnipotence and a sense of self-righteousness, and removed all external and internal constraints on its hubris.⁴ The US today is determined to Americanize the world and restructure every society along secular, capitalist, liberal, and consumerist lines. Its troops are stationed in 120 out of 189 countries, pressurizing their governments to do its bidding. It controls major international economic and political institutions, and uses them to pursue its interests. When that does not work, it resorts to bribery and blackmail to get its way. And when even that fails, it acts unilaterally or through convenient coalitions in contemptuous disregard of international law and institutions. There has hardly been a year when it is not engaged in a military conflict. The wrongly called humanitarian intervention is almost always a response to a crisis created directly or indirectly by the American policy, and invariably results in promoting its political and economic interests. I am convinced that the US today constitutes the greatest threat to world peace and human freedom. Although the Republican administration was most unashamed in its imperialist design, the previous Clinton administration was no better. It pursued the same goals, albeit with greater subtlety and sophistication, and relied more on economic and political pressure than on military force. The current Obama administration's rhetoric is emollient, but its policies have the same thrust. Its approach to all major conflicts is just as partisan and lacks the courage to address their deeper causes.

Although US imperialism must be fought in every part of the world, I am primarily concerned with liberating Muslim societies, not only because I belong to them but also because they constitute the weakest link in the imperial chain and my success there will have global consequences. My goal is to get the Americans out of Muslim societies; to destroy Israel as a separate Jewish state and create a free Palestine in which Jews can live as a respected minority; to remove the corrupt American-supported governments in Muslim societies and restructure the latter along truly Islamic

principles; and finally, to restore the earlier glory of Islam by uniting the umma (universal community of Muslims) and establishing Muslim rule in such erstwhile Muslim-ruled countries as Palestine, Bukhara, Lebanon, Chad, Eritrea, Somalia, the Philippines, South Yemen, Tashkent, Southern Spain (Andalusia), and possibly India.⁵

Violence is the only way to achieve these goals because it is the only language the US understands. And it has to take the form of terror because the militarily ill-equipped Muslims can never match the American might in an open combat. Although our terrorist violence is primarily directed against what I call the 'icons of the US military and economic power', one cannot be so fastidious as to exclude civilians. The US itself has never spared civilians in its wars on us, including killing nearly half a million Iraqi children under the sanctions it imposed on that country.⁶ Since American citizens have freely elected their governments and often supported their policies, or at least failed to protest against and dissociate themselves from them, they are directly or indirectly complicit in their government's deeds.⁷

Since our terrorist violence is widely misunderstood, I should make three additional points. First, it is reactive. We are only responding to the terrorist violence of the US. As I have said repeatedly, we are only defending ourselves, our people, and our land. This is why I say that if we do not get security, the Americans will not get it either. This is a simple demand that even an American child can understand. It is the formula of 'live and let live'.⁸ Americans rob us of our wealth and oil, attack our religion, trample upon our dignity, treat us as pawns in their global game of chess, subject our fighters to the worst imaginable forms of torture, and have the moral impertinence to call us terrorists and barbarians when in fact that label best applies to them.

Second, I distinguish between 'commendable' and 'reprehensible' forms of terrorism. Terrorism to abolish tyranny, external domination, corrupt rulers, and traitors belongs to the first category, and one that imposes or perpetuates these evils belongs to the second. Ours clearly is of the commendable kind. My followers neither kill like cowards nor make personal gains from their actions. They give up the ordinary pleasures of life, careers, families, and even their lives, and show by their self-sacrifice that they are guided by the highest of moral and religious motives. Nothing could be more perverse than to equate their actions with ordinary criminal activities. Our consciences are clear, and I say to my fellow Muslims that 'to kill the Americans and their allies—civilian and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it'.⁹

Third, terrorists need training. I also want to make sure that they are kept on a tight leash and do not go about settling their own personal scores. I therefore set up al-Qaeda al-Subah, both to train a committed band of jihadis and to plan and monitor their activities. We screen our recruits most rigorously, select only those with commitment and character, provide them with a morally sustaining communal ethos, ensure that they are guided by the highest of motives, and inspire them to die as disciplined martyrs.

Now that I have explained myself, may I count on your sympathy and support?

Yours sincerely,
Osama bin Laden

Dear Osama bin Laden,

Reading your letter, my brother Osama, I was strongly reminded of my dialogue with my country's militant nationalists, which began in London in 1908 and continued almost until my death.¹⁰ As in their case, so in yours, I admire your bravery and spirit of self-sacrifice but find your goals unattractive, reasoning perverse, and glorification of violence abhorrent.¹¹

Whether you realize it or not, you think and talk like an imperialist. You present a sanitized picture of Islamic history. All conquests and empires involve bloodshed, oppression, and injustice, and yours was no different. Muslim conquerors destroyed traditional African cultures and religions, and did all they could to obliterate memories of their pre-Islamic past. And although they treated Christian and Jewish communities better, they never granted them equal social status and citizenship. All this occurred a long time ago, and there is no point in lamenting it and apportioning blame. However, since historical memories persist, we must confront them, acknowledge what happened, make such amends as we can, and resolve never to repeat the past. You not only do not do this but also seek to revive Muslim rule in the countries you once ruled. You attack European imperialism not because you are against imperialism but because it ended yours, and you attack Americans because they are preventing you from reviving it. An imperialist yourself, your attacks on the imperialist designs of others sound hollow and hypocritical and convince no one.

You keep talking about establishing a truly Islamic society. I do not at all find your vision of it appealing, nor do many of your fellow Muslims.

You want to combine a centralized state, an industrialized economy, and nuclear weapons with a set of Islamic values and practices. This is a doomed enterprise. Once you opt for the economic, political, and other institutions of modernity, you cannot escape their logic. Your society would become more and more like the Western society and would get sucked into the globalized world dominated by the US. Furthermore, these institutions cannot be sustained without creating an appropriate culture, which is at odds with the religious and moral values you cherish. If you are really serious about developing an alternative vision, you need to undertake a critical examination of your society's values, tease out those that are worth defending, and reject the indefensible. You need to take a more balanced view of the West, neither turning your back on it nor uncritically embracing it but carefully identifying those aspects of it that are worth borrowing and can be integrated in your overall vision. On your own admission, Muslim societies have degenerated. This is so because they are static, inegalitarian, patriarchal, averse to change, and lacking the spirit of scientific inquiry, individual freedom and capacity for collective and cooperative action that the West has developed. I have myself been a grateful student of the West, learning much from its liberal, Christian, and socialist traditions, and suitably integrating them with the Indian ways of life and thought. Dividing the world into the West and the East or the Islamic and the non-Islamic is most unhelpful. It ignores their internal differences, sets up a false opposition, and stands in the way of a mutually beneficial dialogue.

You call the West spiritually empty and its citizens infidels. Although it is consumerist and militarist, many of its citizens have a strong social conscience as seen in their concern for the poor, the welfare state, and the desire to create a just society. Religion matters a great deal to many in the West, and some of them are keen to enter into a dialogue with you. You are wrong to think that Muslims have a monopoly on spirituality. In fact, their spirituality, like that of my own people, is shallow, concerned with how often you pray, fast, and visit the mosque rather than serving your fellow humans and developing the great virtues of humility, benevolence, tolerance, and universal love which all religions, including yours, emphasize.

I am particularly disturbed by your religious views. You believe that Islam is perfect. But all religions contain truths and errors, yours and mine included. Besides every religion can be interpreted in several different ways, some better than others but none final and definitive.¹² Ignoring this, you claim that your interpretation alone is correct and brook no dissent. Like any other religion, yours has over the centuries

acquired many dubious and even sinister beliefs and practices. They hold you back, and you have no future unless you fight them with all your strength. Again, every religion needs to be adapted to the changing circumstances. You ignore this and want to apply the principles of original Islam in their pristine purity to a world that is vastly different. What is worse, you want the state to impose them on all Muslims. This is the surest way to corrupt both religion and the state. Like you, I am a deeply religious person. God matters to me more than my daily food, and I have striven all my life to craft a soul worthy of him. A truly religious person aims to live by the values and beliefs of his religion. If the state has to force them upon him, then clearly his religion has ceased to have any meaning for him. A religiously-based state is a sacrilege, an insult to God and to the human soul. It introduces coercion in areas where it has no role and gives the state an undeserved authority to interpret God's will.

You make these and other mistakes because your analysis of the causes of Muslim degeneration is shallow. You keep blaming the Europeans and Americans but never your own societies for your sad predicament. No outsider can get a direct or indirect foothold in a society unless it is itself rotten, just as no human body succumbs to a disease unless it has lost its regenerative capacity. Please stop blaming others and concentrate your energy on reforming your religion, revitalizing your people, and rebuilding your societies by patiently educating and organizing the masses, and getting them to think critically about their past and present. There are simply no shortcuts to deep social and cultural changes. You are right to say that many Muslim rulers are corrupt stooges of external powers, but you forget that our rulers are not an alien species but a magnified version of ourselves. We create them in our image and are responsible for what they are and do.

It took me some time to realize this, but once I did, I devoted all my energy to build a mass movement dedicated to the task of fighting the ugly social practices of my society, fostering the culture of public debate and self-criticism, and training my countrymen to stand up against widespread economic, social, and political injustices. Osama, you have no patience, no plan of social and religious regeneration, no desire to deal with the deeper causes of social decay. You rely on a tightly knit group of religious activists to transform society. Once in power, they too will become corrupt, arrogant, and dictatorial. And since they will claim to have God on their side, they will be even more intolerant and repressive. As I said earlier, society and the state are simply their members writ large. Unless ordinary men and women are empowered, reformed, and fired with a fierce desire for individual freedom and collective self-determination, all societies remain vulnerable to a takeover by corrupt

rulers. I appeal to ordinary Muslims to reclaim their religion and society from their self-proclaimed leaders. Only they can regenerate them.

While repeatedly attacking the Americans, you also keep attacking the Jews and have often expressed deeply offensive anti-Semitic sentiments. I could not disagree more. Unlike you, I have worked and lived with them, admire their intellectual and moral qualities, and know them and their history well. Some of them became my closest friends in South Africa, and one of them bought a farm where we experimented with communal living. I once called them the 'untouchables of Christianity'. Although they are an integral part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, they were for centuries ostracized, shunned, humiliated, and subjected to degrading treatment, of which the Nazi atrocity was the most horrendous example. Christians treated them the way my people treated the untouchables, and both have much to atone for.

I know well that the victims of yesterday can easily become the oppressors of tomorrow, and use their past suffering to excuse and even legitimize their brutal treatment of others. Israel has in recent years behaved in a most unjust manner with the blind support of the US and even the otherwise liberal Jewish diaspora that freely talks about human rights remains silent when these are systematically violated in Israel. Its misdeeds must be exposed and opposed, but you must also appreciate that its people are haunted by their bitter historical memories of persecution, feel deeply insecure, and sometimes find it difficult to trust even the well-meaning outsiders. They have now found a homeland and understandably feel intensely possessive about it. Their externally imposed homeland rendered the Palestinians homeless and caused them immense suffering. I was against the separate state of Israel and wanted the Jews to win the hearts of and live peacefully with the Palestinians. That did not happen, and the establishment of Israel led to a predictable cycle of violence. We must find a way of ending that cycle.

Although I was bitterly opposed to the Partition of India, I eventually accepted it in the hope that once the two quarrelling communities of Hindus and Muslims had spaces to themselves and the time to cool their tempers, they would appreciate their common interests, revive memories of past peaceful coexistence, and live together in a fraternal spirit. Osama, you can learn something from this. You should accept the existence of Israel, give it the sense of security it needs, and work patiently towards getting it to appreciate the justice of the Palestinian cause. As long as you threaten it, you frighten its people, blunt their conscience, and drive them into the arms of its most reactionary and militarist leaders. Sensible Israelis know that they have to live in the

midst of Arab societies, that the latter will not forever remain backward and divided, and that they must take risks in the interest of their own security and peace. If you allow the Israelis to lead peaceful and normal lives, they will be compelled by the logic of their history, geography, and demography to become peaceful members of the wider Arab world. At the same time, the world must also put effective moral, economic, and political pressure on them so as to strengthen their progressive forces and reassure the Palestinians that they are not political orphans.

Finally, I turn to your terrorist methods. I find them unacceptable on pragmatic and moral grounds. They cannot drive away the Americans who will use their might to smash your terrorist camps and networks. They do not mind violating the international law and even their own constitutional procedures, and you have no hope against such a determined opponent. Even if they were to go, your methods would not defeat their corrupt indigenous collaborators, let alone revitalize Muslim societies. There is not a single example in history of terrorists creating a humane and healthy society. The reasons for this are obvious. A society is ultimately sustained by the willing allegiance and support of its members, and these cannot be secured by terrorist means. Furthermore, once a society gets used to terrorism, it falls into the habit of resorting to it every time it encounters opposition, making a stable social order impossible. Today, Osama, you use terrorism against the Americans and Muslim rulers; tomorrow your people will use it against you and claim the same justification for it. When will this vicious cycle end?

I also have more important moral objections to your methods. Human life is sacred and taking it is inherently evil. Besides, however fallen a human being might be, he is never so degenerate that he cannot be won over or neutralized by organized moral pressure. Human beings do evil deeds because they are in the grip of evil ideas or passions, or because of the structural compulsions of the wider social system. Violence does not address any of these and makes the situation even more intractable.

Evil should certainly be resisted. Indeed, not to do so is to be complicit in its continuance and bear at least passive responsibility for it. As I have shown by example, organized non-violent resistance is the only moral and effective way to fight evil. It appeals to the opponent's decent instincts, mobilizes the power of public opinion, allows time for tempers to cool and reason to work, avoids false polarization, and leaves behind no lasting legacy of mutual hatred. Do not play your opponent's game and lower yourself to his level, dear Osama. Take upon yourself the burden of his evil, become his conscience, and transform both the context of your conflict and the quality of your relationship.

Take the case of the Palestinians. They have used violence, which Israel has countered with far greater violence. They fire largely ineffective rockets that inflict little harm on Israel and instead invite a far more effective retaliation. The result is an increasing brutalization of both societies, and an ever-growing burden of hatred and bitter memories. Now consider what would happen if the Palestinians were to follow my advice. They would eschew posing threats to Israeli citizens, acknowledge them as their brothers, appeal to their sense of justice and long history of humiliation, and get them to appreciate both the immense suffering they are causing to the Palestinians and the great damage they are doing to their own psyche and society. The Palestinians could also invoke the collective memories of a shared life in the past and the great Jewish tradition of concern for the oppressed. Since moral appeals have their limits, they would need to mount well-organized acts of non-violent resistance and dare the Israeli government to do its worst.

I cannot imagine that any Israeli government, not even that of Benjamin Netanyahu, would kill unarmed and peaceful protesters with the world watching. If it did, it would not only incur universal condemnation including that of the Jewish diaspora but also divide its own people. Some of its morally conscious citizens would disown its actions, and those who have been hitherto passive and indifferent would be forced to ask themselves if they wish to be a party to the slaughter of innocent people. I am also convinced that some Israeli soldiers would disobey government orders, as a few, sadly too few, are already doing and as their Indian counterparts did during our struggle against the British rule. After the June 1982 invasion of southern Lebanon, about a quarter of Israeli Jews protested. A movement called *Yesh Gvul* (There is a limit) was born, and many reservists refused military service. In 2003, Tom Hurndall, a British photography student, was shot in the head in Gaza while trying to rescue Palestinian children from assault by an Israeli soldier. In spite of the government's attempts to cover it up, the incident aroused public condemnation, and two years later, the soldier involved was sentenced to eight years of imprisonment for manslaughter. Things are, of course, not so simple. A frightened and brutal Israeli government might put down Palestinian protests by force and some would die. However, since they are dying anyway, why not die as active moral agents freely choosing death over oppression rather than as passive and helpless victims? Unlike the current wave of violence, peaceful protests would have the advantage of delegitimizing Israeli violence, mobilizing world opinion against it, and raising the morale and moral standing of the Palestinians.

You might say, as some of your associates have done, that non-violence comes easily to us Hindus and is alien to the Islamic tradition. This is

not true. As our two great epics are commonly understood, we Hindus have a long tradition of violence. And as both our past and present history shows, we are by temperament as violent a people as any other. It was only after a long campaign and examples of the successful use of non-violent resistance that I was able to bring them around to accepting non-violence, and that too not completely and wholeheartedly. As for Muslims, you should know that they too have a long tradition of non-violent resistance. The ferocious Pathans (tribes of the Northwest Frontier Provinces of what is now Pakistan) embraced it with great success under the guidance of my friend Abdul Gaffar Khan. No religion is inherently for or against violence. It has a potential for both, and everything depends on how its followers understand and practise it.

With blessings and love,

M.K. Gandhi

Dear Mahatma Gandhi,

I must confess that I never had a reason to read your writings or follow your life. You are not as well known in Muslim countries as you are in the West, and all I knew about you was that you were a Hindu leader of India who could not command the loyalty of the Muslims and fought against the British with a passive, feminine, and largely ineffective method. But I was sufficiently inspired by our correspondence to read and reflect on your life and work. While I now see you a little differently, I remain unpersuaded.

You misrepresent your Indian experience and, like all moralists, uncritically universalize it. Since British forces did not occupy your country, they had to depend on local support, which naturally placed considerable constraints on their behaviour. The British people were also ambivalent about the empire, and some of them were even opposed to it. You could therefore always count on a sympathetic body of British opinion to support your case for Independence. By the time you came to dominate the Indian political scene, the British had been weakened by the First World War. The Great Depression and the events leading up to the Second World War and that war itself debilitated them yet further. You were therefore in the fortunate position to confront a weak opponent that had neither the will nor the means to continue to rule over your country. The British were also a reasonably decent people, and after the horrendous Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, they never unleashed massive and indiscriminate violence against your people. You should also remember that you lived at a time when there were several centres

of power in the world, each limiting the actions of others, and none, not even the British, enjoyed global supremacy.

The historical context in which I have to operate could not be more different. It is dominated by a hyperpower with a global reach and an overwhelming military superiority over the rest of the world put together. The US feels triumphant after its victory in the Cold War and thinks that it can now do what it likes. It is driven by an insatiable appetite for profit and the consequent desire to turn the whole world into a market for its goods. Its political system is dominated by huge corporations, industrial as well as military, to which its politicians are willing hostages. Although it incarcerates proportionately more of its citizens and has a larger percentage of poor people than any other advanced nation, and although it has launched more clandestine, proxy, or open wars against other countries than any other, the US considers its deeply flawed capitalist democracy to be a model for the rest of the world, and insists without the slightest embarrassment that it has a right and a duty to export it. This formidable and historically unique combination of self-righteousness, missionary spirit, national self-interest, moral myopia, and overwhelming power in a single country has radically transformed the world. Your ideas, Mr Gandhi, belong to a world that is dead and offer no help to those fighting against current injustices.

The Americans have to be checked in the interest of global peace, stability, and justice. This requires not just military power but also a superior vision of society that satisfies the deepest aspirations of the human soul. Europe cannot provide this because it is part of the same Western civilization and because it is all too keen to share the spoils of the US empire. Only Islam offers an alternative. It has the right vision of society and the will to realize it. It also has the requisite wealth, strength of numbers, and a long historical experience of ruling over a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. It is therefore important for the Muslim countries to unite, acquire nuclear weapons, take control of their oil wealth, and lead the world in the right direction. I understand your fears and assure you that we do not seek to impose our views on others, let alone run their societies. We want to establish true Islam in Muslim countries and are confident that the power of their example will over time win over the rest of the world. The Cold War was dominated by a clash between the two materialist ideologies of capitalism and communism, and although the former won, it is already in great trouble, and people are looking for an alternative. Since Islam provides it, the future belongs to us. More people, even in the otherwise hostile West, are today converting to Islam than to all other

religions put together. History is marching in our direction, a sure sign of Allah's will.

You say that my vision of a truly Islamic society is muddled. I would say the same about yours. You reject modernity; I do not. The modern world is here to stay, has much to be said for it, and anyone opting out of it is doomed to impotence. I do not want an alternative to modernity as you do but an alternative modernity, a society that draws on modern technology and places it in the service of Islam. I want nuclear weapons, the modern state, industrialization, and so on, without which my people would remain at the mercy of the West, but I do not want the modern secular, egalitarian, and liberal culture with all its attendant evils of atheism, pornography, confused gender roles, promiscuity, homosexuality, selfish individualism, consumerism, and materialism. Such a cultural synthesis, which aims to give modernity an Islamic soul, is possible and worth fighting for. You are right to say that I do not yet have a blueprint. This is partly because I have not had the time to work it out, partly because I need to be vague to broaden my support, and partly because I believe in fighting one battle at a time.

You condemn my terrorist violence. Unlike you, I do not consider violence inherently evil. I take an instrumental view of it and judge it on the basis of its goals and ability to realize them. As you should know, your non-violence did not always work, and you were compelled to compromise. From time to time, your desperate followers resorted to acts of violence, and you defended these as 'understandable' and 'excusable'. Your non-violent struggle was constantly shadowed by terrorist activities, which frightened and weakened the British and must be given as much credit for achieving Indian Independence as your non-violence. Every method of struggle requires certain conditions for its success. Non-violence requires a decent opponent, freedom to mount protests, united people, and a reasonably impartial media. You had all four; I have none. We do not have the civil liberties you enjoyed. If we resorted to non-violent protests, the Americans and their domestic stooges would infiltrate our ranks, create divisions, spread false stories, and, if all that failed, use force to mow us down. They would then use the global media to manipulate public opinion in their favour. You should know how cleverly they misreported, suppressed, or explained away the deaths of over half a million children caused by the decade long sanctions against Iraq.

If you need further proof, look at the ways in which the Americans and the British justified—and continue to justify—the war on Iraq. They claimed to have incontrovertible proof that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and they still cannot find them. Balanced reports of British

and American intelligence services were deliberately doctored by politicians, who proved more dishonourable than even their spies. When Swedish diplomat Hans Blix introduced a note of caution, he was vilified. When the French President Jacques Chirac said that the arms inspectors should be given more time, he was deliberately misrepresented as wanting to veto the legally necessary second UN Resolution and as being against the war itself. We do not know how many Iraqi civilians died during and in the immediate aftermath of the war because the occupying powers did not consider their lives worthy enough to be counted. We are told little about the atrocities committed against ordinary Iraqis by American soldiers, and only a handful of the latter have been punished.

A similar situation obtains in relation to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. Their daily humiliation and harassment receives little international or domestic publicity in Israel, and such reports as do appear fail to convey its full horror. Israel's goal is to liquidate the Palestinians, take away their land, and scatter them among the neighbouring countries. Yet everyone including the allegedly liberal Jewish diaspora says that it wants peace and blames the Palestinians for fighting for their rights. The Palestinian ranks are infiltrated by the Israeli network of spies who report on their every activity, blackmail them into doing their bidding, and create divisions and conflicts. The Palestinians do not have the freedom to organize either. There is therefore not the slightest chance of success for their non-violent protests. If ever a leader of your stature, Mr Gandhi, were to appear, he would be put out of the way before he got started, as Israel did with Mubarak Awad. And even if he managed to mount protests, these would be ruthlessly put down and the news would never reach the outside world. You must know that the first intifada in 1987 was largely non-violent involving tax resistance, boycott, refusal to help build Israeli settlements, and so on, but since it yielded no results, people lost their faith in non-violence. The American activist Rachel Corrie, who travelled to Gaza to act as a human shield at a moment of intense conflict between the Israeli military and the Palestinians, was crushed to death under a military bulldozer. Nothing happened to her killers. Even the fact that she was an American citizen did not help her. The ruthless Israeli government is currently busy abandoning even its flawed democracy in favour of Jewish nationalism and turning its Arabs into second- and even third-class citizens with the complicity of the global media. I have been told that it was for these and related reasons that Yasser Arafat rightly turned down the advice, pressed upon him by some of your American and European (mainly Christian) admirers, to eschew violence in favour of a non-violent movement.¹³

You have an acute sense of the power of tradition, and need hardly be reminded that every society has its own cultural ecology and rhythm. Its members view the world and organize their lives in certain ways and can be inspired to great deeds by appealing to them in their native idioms. Islam takes a more charitable view of violence than you do and sanctions, even enjoins, it under certain circumstances. It does hold human life sacred but not always and unconditionally. The Prophet himself used violence on several occasions, and so did his followers and other great Muslim religious and political leaders. Even if I were to plead for non-violence, which I would not dream of doing, it simply would not be accepted by my fellow Muslims. The Pathan followers of your friend Abdul Gaffar Khan used it for a while and then abandoned it in favour of violence. I see no other way to shake off the American domination. And since we cannot even remotely match their might, our violence has to take a terrorist form.

We resorted to violence to get rid of the Soviets in Afghanistan. Americans understood this and gave us all the help we needed. And it is precisely because of this that they are now scared of the same methods being used against them. As I have said on several occasions, the struggle against the Soviets was a profound 'spiritual experience' for me and my fellow fighters, and represented a decisive turning point in our way of thinking.¹⁴ It gave us self-confidence, expanded our political horizon, and enabled us to move beyond the narrow, largely ethnic, Arab nationalism towards the vision of a wider Islamic unity. I would rather stick to the method my followers and I have found successful than try yours. You keep telling me that I should not lower myself to the level of my opponent and should act instead on higher principles. I could not disagree more. If others hit me, I hit back. If they harm me or my people, I retaliate. This is justice, even common sense. Why should I take upon myself the burden of their evil, endure the suffering involved, and allow them to escape the consequences of their deeds? I follow Prophet Muhammad, not Jesus Christ; even Christians find Christ's high moral ground impractical and morally suspect.

I am beginning to see what deep differences divide us. You have often said that we all see truth from our different standpoints and arrive at different views. I act on truth as I see it and expect you to respect my views even as I respect yours.

Yours,
Osama bin Laden

Dear Osama,

As you say, deep differences divide us. You hold the following views, and I could not disagree more. First, although they deny it, the Americans have embarked on an imperialist project to dominate the world. Second, Muslim societies should be reconstructed on the basis of the true principles of Islam. Third, this cannot be done without getting the Americans out of your societies and overthrowing their native collaborators. Fourth, only the terrorist violence can achieve these goals.

As for the first, you are wrong to generalize about the Americans or the West. Some groups fit your description, others do not. Many Americans including the African Americans are deeply unhappy with the state of their society and seek radical changes in it. They were highly critical of what the Bush administration was doing in their name and protested against the war on Iraq. Some of those who supported the administration did so because they had built up a fear psychosis after the events of 11 September 2001 and swallowed Bush's view that his global war on terrorism was the answer. As long as you keep talking the way you do, you reinforce their paranoia. If you could talk the language of peace and link up with the progressive forces in the US, you would have a better chance of success.

As for your second argument, I could not disagree more. All past and present experience of human kind confirms my view that identifying religion with state corrupts both. Religion has a legitimate place in public life and is an important source of peoples' commitments and motivations. But that is quite different from saying that the state should be based on, enforce, or be guided by religious doctrines. Religion is one voice in public life but not the only one, and it should rely on persuasion not compulsion. The state is based on coercion, religion on choice; the state is concerned with conduct, religion with inner motives and the strivings of the soul; and the two simply cannot go together. In your case, the situation is made worse by the fact that you do not take an open, tolerant, and dynamic view of religion but a static, self-righteous, and dogmatic one. This commits you to a tightly knit politico-religious party supervising all areas of individual and social life, which is the surest way to destroy religion, create a terrorist state, and turn human beings into soulless automata. Have you learned nothing from the disastrous experiences of Iran and your own 'land of the two holy mosques' as you call Saudi Arabia?

Your third proposition is only partially true. I agree that you cannot achieve significant changes in your society without ending US influence, and I wish you well in your anti-imperialist endeavour.

However, you forget that physically removing Americans from Muslim countries will not end the domination of American or Western values and views of life. You can only fight ideas with ideas, and need to develop and popularize a more humane alternative than you offer. Furthermore, as long as your society remains deeply divided, unjust, and unequal, and lacks a strong sense of independence and solidarity, it will remain too weak to resist Western manipulation and domination. Terrorist attacks on the West or its domestic collaborators might give you a febrile feeling of exaltation and satisfy your ego, but they will achieve nothing lasting. You need to train a cadre of social activists, work among the masses, raise their level of critical consciousness, open up spaces for action, and shake up the established structure of power by judicious acts of protest led by a broad-based, cultural, and political movement. When that happens, and only then, the US or the West will have no power to dominate your society.

Finally, you make a serious mistake in rejecting non-violence. Braving the brutality of the southern states, Martin Luther King used non-violence to secure civil rights for black Americans and give them a sense of pride and self-confidence. Iranians too successfully used it against the Shah. The more his troops killed innocent protestors, the more rapidly his regime crumbled, with even some of his troops deserting him. You say that my own countrymen resorted to violence from time to time, that I sanctioned it, and even that our Independence was largely a product of it. In fact, only a small group of my countrymen resorted to violence when provoked beyond endurance. Although I said it was understandable, I continued to condemn it, sometimes fasted in a spirit of atonement, and even expressed my regrets to the colonial rulers. To condone isolated acts of violence by desperate individuals is one thing; to make violence the principal method of struggle is altogether different.

As for our Independence, violence played only a small part in it. Whenever we used it, the colonial government ruthlessly put it down with the active help of our own people. I had to make them aware of their complicity in their oppression and get them to withdraw their support, which is what my non-violent movement aimed to do. You, Osama, overlook the most important fact that getting the British out of India was not my sole or, until late into my leadership, even principal concern and should not be the only basis for judging my non-violence. As I said of the Dandi March and the Civil Disobedience Movement, it was not designed to establish Independence but to arm the people with the power to do so. I wanted to build up their inner strength and make them fit for *swarāj*, and my *satyagrahas* were all part of their training.

I was keen that they should regain their cultural autonomy and pride, and develop their own distinctive moral voice rather than meekly mimic the West. I wanted them to overcome their all too familiar class, caste, regional, and religious divisions, and create a healthy and cohesive society without which their Independence, when it came, would remain fragile. I was anxious to bring women into public life on a large scale and involve them as equals. I wanted to train my people to protest in an organized and disciplined manner against injustices that were bound to scar even an independent India, and to ensure that they felt empowered and engaged enough to take ownership of the new state. These large and long-term cultural, moral, and political goals that included but went far beyond political independence could only have been achieved by a mass-based non-violent movement. Violence might at best have achieved political independence, though I very much doubt it, but not *swarāj* or the wider transformation of the Indian mind and society.

You complain that the Western media are biased against your cause and that your non-violent struggle would not receive a fair hearing. Some sections of the media are certainly biased, but others have a strong professional conscience. Had that not been the case, we would not have known the full scale of the atrocities committed by the coalition forces during and after the war on Iraq. The media cannot ignore peaceful protests altogether, for that would discredit them, and in any case, people have other means of spreading and getting the news. Ordinary men and women are not as gullible as you imagine. They know well that the media are biased and make appropriate allowances for that. If that had not been the case, the scale of Western opposition to the war on Iraq or to the Israeli behaviour in the occupied territories would be inexplicable. I would go so far as to say that by exaggerating the power of the media, you fall into the trap set by your opponents. They want you to despair of the media and resort to desperate acts of terrorism so that they can demonize you and divert attention from your genuine grievances. If your cause is just and pursued in a peaceful and humane manner, it is bound to command attention. Truth cannot be suppressed for long. My long political experience bears this out. And in any case, for religious persons like you and me, this has to be our basic article of faith.

Your actions have done incalculable harm to your people and tarnished the image of your great religion. Millions now instinctively associate Islam with terror and destruction. You have deeply divided the *umma*, subjected your followers to torture and degradation, and rendered miserable the lives of many innocent diasporic Muslims. You have given the West an excuse to unleash massive violence and legitimized its project of global

domination. It is time you grew out of your obsession with death and destruction and showed some humility and common sense. My religion forbids me to give up on any human being, not even on you.

You refer to my views on truth but wholly misunderstand them. Our perceptions of it are certainly partial and relative to our standpoints. That does not mean that we should stick to them but rather that we should be open to other points of view, revise our own in the light of them, and grow from truth to truth.

Yours,
M.K. Gandhi

It is easy to imagine how Osama bin Laden would reply to Gandhi, the latter in turn to him, and how their dialogue would proceed. Deep and irresolvable differences between them would remain in several areas. Although Gandhi is willing to condone violence by isolated individuals provoked beyond endurance, he does not advocate or justify it and remains opposed in principle to all forms of collective or organized violence including terrorism. Since bin Laden does not share the philosophico-religious framework within which Gandhi's view is grounded and the latter cannot conclusively establish it, their differences remain irresolvable.

A related difficulty arises in relation to Gandhi's view that the victims of oppression should not reduce themselves to the level of its perpetrator, but should instead take over the burden of his wrongdoing, act as his conscience, and seek to transform him by their redemptive suffering. Osama bin Laden cannot see the point of this. The perpetrator of oppression is an independent and self-determining moral agent responsible for his actions. His victims are morally entitled to fight for their rights with such means as are necessary, and are under no obligation to take a high moral ground and patiently suffer such pain as he inflicts in order to transform him. Since bin Laden does not share the moral ontology underlying Gandhi's view and the latter has no way of convincing him, their differences spring from fundamental moral commitments and are incapable of rational resolution. At a different level, bin Laden regards Islam as a perfect religion representing the final and exhaustive divine self-revelation and offering the true principles

of personal and social morality. Gandhi gives good reasons why such a claim for any religion including Islam is misguided, whereas bin Laden cannot give any in his support and should be able to appreciate Gandhi's view. However, since this is ultimately a matter of faith, bin Laden is under no logical compulsion to abandon his claim.

In spite of these and other deep and sometimes irresolvable differences where rational discussion reaches its limits, there is considerable room for a broad agreement at the more important political level, which makes dialogue both possible and valuable. Osama bin Laden should be able to appreciate that the West, including the US, speaks in many voices and that while some of its powerful groups seek global hegemony, others are highly critical of it as demonstrated by several popular movements, opinion polls, and the groups that helped President Obama win his two terms of office. Osama's best hope of influencing the US foreign policy is to put sustained moral, economic, and political pressure on it, and this cannot be done by terrorist violence, which only feeds its nationalist hysteria and fuels Islamophobia. He might not accept non-violence as a moral principle, but should be able to see its value as a prudent policy.

Osama bin Laden seeks to bring about profound changes in the Muslim, especially Arab, societies. He has no answer to Gandhi's view that a profound cultural and political transformation of a society cannot be secured in a hurry or by simply removing the rulers. It requires raising popular consciousness, extensive religious reform, undermining the hold of the dominant ideology, mass mobilization, and a committed group of activists ready to work among the people. It also requires identifying and cultivating progressive constituencies, winning over those who are sympathetic to change, careful articulation of short- and long-term objectives, and an effective programme of radical social reform. All this involves a patient, prolonged, and painful intellectual and political struggle of the kind Gandhi advocates and whose importance Osama or at least his open-minded followers should be able to appreciate.

Osama bin Laden wants to create truly Islamic societies, and here too Gandhi makes a telling point. As Gandhi points out, there is no non-controversial way to define Islam, and any attempt to impose one is bound to involve massive internal violence and disorder in Muslim societies, which bin Laden says he wants to avoid. Furthermore, as Gandhi argues, the fusion of religion and state corrupts both. Religion

gets subjected to state manipulation and loses its integrity. Religious differences turn into political differences and become even more intractable. As for the state, it not only alienates and forfeits its legitimacy in the eyes of those who belong to minority religions or to none or disagree with its official interpretation but is also required to pry into the human soul and deal with matters that are inherently beyond its reach. If bin Laden has an open mind and enters the dialogue in the right spirit, he should be able to see the force of Gandhi's argument.

Like any other political dialogue, that between Gandhi and bin Laden neither takes place in a political vacuum nor is its outcome decided by them alone. Two crucial groups are also silent but influential participants in it. The first consists of people in the Muslim especially the Arab societies whose active or passive support is vital. If large sections of them were to be persuaded by the Gandhian alternative, as was evident during the short-lived Arab Spring, and insisted on taking charge of their collective destiny themselves in a democratic spirit, bin Laden and his followers would need to change their approach radically or risk becoming irrelevant. The second constituency consists of citizens in the West. Their ability to understand the reasons why ordinary Muslims feel sympathetic to bin Laden in varying degrees and their willingness to pressure their governments to change their policies plays an equally important part in determining the outcome of the dialogue. As they send out reassuring messages of solidarity to the Muslim world and succeed in changing the policies of their governments, they weaken the hold of bin Laden's Manichean world view. The battle against that view thus is fought simultaneously within the Muslim societies and in the West. Gandhi understood this well and took as much care to win over the public opinion in India as in the West, especially in Britain. Osama bin Laden too would need to learn this important lesson and recast his strategy appropriately.

Dialogue with the likes of bin Laden is both possible and necessary. It is obviously not enough and involves some passages of irresolvable differences but it can do much to improve mutual understanding, resolve some differences, build trust, and detoxicate the intellectual and political climate so necessary for the ordinary political processes to operate.

II

GANDHI AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE*

In many parts of the world today, religion is one of the main or contributory causes of conflict, and proposals to encourage a dialogue and better understanding between religions rightly enjoy widespread support. While the importance of dialogue can hardly be exaggerated, much of the discussion of it tends to ignore its complexity and pitfalls.

First, inter-religious dialogue has a tendency to homogenize religions and ignore their internal diversity. Indeed the very talk of dialogue between religions suggests that they are coherent, internally unified, and easily distinguishable entities. Every religion is supposed to speak in one voice, and that is secured by reducing it to one of its allegedly representative strands. This not only gives a false account of it but also leads to misguided contrasts with other religions. An inter-religious dialogue can paradoxically become an unwitting source of dangerous misunderstanding if it ignores the internal diversity of each religion and their areas of convergence and divergence.

Second, intra-religious dialogue is just as important as the inter-religious. Many religious conflicts occur between the followers of the same religion, such as those between Shias and Sunnis in the Middle East and elsewhere, Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, and different versions of Hinduism in India, Judaism in Israel, and Buddhism in parts

*This chapter is a substantially revised version of 'Gandhi and Interreligious Dialogue', *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Douglas Allen (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008).

of South-East Asia. Although at one level, conflicts within a religious community are easier to handle than those between them, like family quarrels they can also be more intractable and bloody.

Third, some of the current conflicts are not between religions but rather between the religious and the secular views of the world. For many secularists, religion represents a reactionary and obscurantist view of the world, trades in passions and dogmas, and is a force for evil. It should be fought and its influence undermined, and in the meantime it should be watched, restrained, and restricted to the private realm. For their part, religious people think that secularism leads to arid rationalism, moral relativism, or even nihilism; deprives human life of a sense of meaning and dignity; breeds illusions of human omnipotence; and leaves a religion-shaped hole that is filled by murderous and militant political ideologies. Believers and secularists see each other as mortal enemies whom they must defeat in the larger interest of human dignity and freedom. A sympathetic dialogue between the two with a view to making each sensitive to the anxieties and concerns of the other is just as badly needed as that between religions.

Fourth, conflicts between religious groups have complex causes. Doctrinal differences and hostility do play a part but so do the deeper conflicts of economic and political interests that are often played out at the religious level. Inter-religious dialogue deals with only one source of conflict and needs to be embedded in a wider one aimed at uncovering and resolving other sources of conflict.

Fifth, inter-religious dialogue is often defined in theological terms and taken to involve discussion of doctrinal differences. Although this is important, it can easily get bogged down into abstract philosophical debates where differences are deep and difficult to resolve. It helps greatly to concentrate on concrete issues of common interest such as global justice, poverty, family breakdown, climate change, drug addiction, crime, and ethnic conflicts. Such an issue-based and action-oriented dialogue encourages each religion to examine how its principles and doctrines translate into practice. Since there is generally greater agreement on how best to deal with concrete issues, the dialogue and the resulting cooperation shapes their readings of their basic principles and beliefs themselves, and could bring them closer at the abstract philosophical level as well. When general principles are unpacked and tested against shared problems, they often turn out to share far more in common than appears at first sight.

Finally, the dialogue need not be formal, articulated in propositional forms, and confined to institutional settings as is often assumed. It could be informal, tentative, casual, driven by curiosity about others' lives and conduct or the practical need to live and work together, and occur spontaneously between individuals in different settings. Such a relaxed, unstructured, and unplanned dialogue with its often subtle and semi-conscious fusion of ideas and sensibilities is valuable not only in itself but also as a way of creating a conducive climate for its formal counterpart. Greater attention deserves to be paid to how it can be fostered than is currently the case.

An inter-religious dialogue so designed as to take account of these and related considerations may be undertaken for several reasons such as promoting better mutual understanding, securing cooperation on practical issues, getting a comparative perspective on one's own religious tradition and history, and forming alliances against secularists. Each of these reasons gives it a particular form, and has its strengths and limitations. They all, however, encourage inter-religious dialogue to attain objectives that are not themselves religious in nature. Since religious persons are generally guided by religious considerations or at least tend to give them greater weight, their dialogue is likely to have greater intellectual and emotional depth and a greater chance of forging strong bonds between them if it was inspired by reasons internal to religion itself. Are there good religious reasons why a religious person should take sympathetic interest in other religions? Since Mahatma Gandhi has the unique distinction of being a leading exponent and practitioner of the view that there are, he deserves careful consideration.

Gandhi is also important for another related reason. In an inter-religious dialogue as in others, the participants are located in and seek to reach out to each other from within their respective traditions. Unlike the conservatives who are anxious not to weaken or dilute the traditional boundary and limit the extent and depth of the dialogue, Gandhi sees it as a creative process in which the participants are willing to transgress their religious boundaries and redefine their identity. They not only wish to know more about others but also to learn from them, adopt what is valuable in them, and turn the dialogue into a mutually transformative process from which they emerge as more or less new persons. The traditional identity-defining boundary is not rejected but redrawn and rendered porous. The way Gandhi does this offers important insights into the creative interplay between identity and dialogue.

Nature of Religion

For Gandhi, reason and experience are the most reliable sources of knowledge and should guide human life. Not all areas of life, however, are equally within their reach, and some even fall outside them. When dealing with the latter, we have no choice but to go beyond reason and experience and make what he calls a 'leap of faith'. Since faith can open the door to all manner of dubious belief, we must ensure that it is rational not blind—that is, it should not contradict or go against reason and experience and should in that sense be permitted or allowed by them. It may go beyond them only when they are silent or inconclusive, and even then, it should be constantly guided by them. For Gandhi, a belief in the divine power or spirit is of this kind.¹ Indeed it is a 'plausible' and even necessary 'hypothesis' if we are to make sense of the world. His arguments are eclectic, some fairly common, others derived from the Hindu tradition upon which he heavily draws.

The natural world is not a chaotic mass but an ordered whole, is governed by laws, and exhibits a rational structure. Furthermore, the subtle, highly sophisticated, and complex mechanisms by which even the minutest living beings survive and flourish in their often hostile environment cannot be explained in purely functional or even evolutionary terms. Evolution follows a particular direction and pattern, throws up and sustains increasingly higher forms of consciousness and life, and is not a chance occurrence or a chaotic process. Again although both good and evil exist in the universe, good not only survives but also triumphs in the long run. Indeed evil would not last a day unless it was sustained by good. Gangs of murderers might go about killing everyone in sight, but they must at least trust one another and work together. Good is self-sufficient, whereas evil is parasitic, and the former is basic to the world in a way that evil is not. Gandhi argues that these and other features of the world point to the fact that it is grounded in and regulated by a supreme intelligence, a cosmic spirit, a mysterious power, or what he prefers to call Absolute Truth.

Gandhi thinks that its existence is also confirmed by human experience. Many spiritual seekers over the centuries have claimed to 'see', 'hear', or 'feel the presence' or 'the touch' of the divine power. While an isolated individual might be dismissed as a victim of hallucination or self-induced delusion, this could not be said of all of them, especially when they were men and women of great intelligence, belonged to

all ages and societies, and their lives had been profoundly transformed by their experiences. Many ordinary men and women too have experiences of transcendence or receiving unexpected help or guidance in moments of despair. Indeed human life is full of small and large miracles that cannot all be put down to coincidences or dismissed as accidents. Gandhi claims to have had such experiences himself. He said that thanks to his lifelong struggle to become a pure soul, free of base passions and all traces of egoism, he received divine guidance in moments of deep despair through the medium of a clear and unambiguous 'inner' or 'still small voice'.² He does not say why he calls it the voice of God, what distinctive features marked it out as one, and whether he had heard voices that turned out to be deceptive as with the Prophet Mohammed's so-called satanic verses.

Since reason and experience do not entail or mandate a belief in the divine power, it represents a leap of faith. However, since it is permitted or allowed by them, it is rational and not like a belief in ghosts and witches. One might refuse to make a leap of faith if one has a better explanation of those experiences or features of the world that lead the believer to make it. In Gandhi's view, the atheist's mistake lies in dismissing religious belief without offering a coherent alternative explanation of them. He either refuses to acknowledge their existence because they do not conform to his narrow criteria of what counts as facts, or conveniently dismisses them as aberrations or accidents that need no explanation. In either case he is being unacceptably dogmatic.

Gandhi goes further and argues that since moral and religious beliefs are meant to guide life, they should be judged not only by their cognitive or epistemic validity but also their practical consequences. In his view, the belief in the existence of the divine power makes the inevitable tragedies of life easier to bear; protects one against the cynicism provoked by the meanness, ingratitude, and misdeeds of one's fellow humans; encourages human beings to love and care for one another; and inspires them to undertake heroic deeds in pursuit of valuable causes. While appreciating that religion can also have opposite consequences, Gandhi thinks that they generally arise from a narrow, misguided, or perverse interpretation of it, and are best dealt with by an open and self-critical dialogue within it.

Since the belief in the divine power is subject to the test of reason and experience, Gandhi argues that it should not exceed what is

warranted by them. In his view, all we can say is that there is a cosmic power or force, a supreme intelligence, or Absolute Truth in which the universe is grounded and by which it is sustained. It is pure or disembodied consciousness, not the consciousness of some being, for the latter would then have to be other than consciousness. It is neither one nor many because such quantitative predicates cannot be attributed to it. It is formless, and colour, gender, shape, and other physical qualities cannot be ascribed to it either. Although it did not create the universe, which in Gandhi's view is eternal, it structures and informs its movements. It acts in a rational manner, is embodied in the natural and moral laws, and is basically benevolent. Since it represents supreme intelligence and acts rationally, we are able to make sense of it and can judge it by our normal standards of rationality. However, since it exceeds our limited cognitive capacities, some of its modes of operation 'elude' our comprehension and remain 'mysterious' or 'inscrutable'. Evil in the form of natural disasters is obviously inconsistent with a benevolent divine power. We might conclude that the cosmic power is powerless to prevent them, or, more likely, that it 'permits' them for reasons we do not fully understand.³

For Gandhi, human beings have great difficulty conceptualizing the formless and qualityless transcendental reality. As bodily beings who live out their lives in a world characterized by size, shape, gender, physical separateness, and so on, they are used to certain forms and categories of thought which they unwittingly project on to the ultimate reality.⁴ Not surprisingly, they personalize it, think of it as a person like them though infinitely greater, and ascribe to it human qualities. Gandhi calls such a personalized view of God 'relative truth', truth as it is available to or grasped by the limited human mind. 'Fundamentally God is indescribable in words.... The qualities we attribute to God with the purest of motives are true for us but fundamentally false.'⁵

Although Gandhi's language is sometimes misleading and his concept of relative truth is inadequately analysed, he does not think that the personal view of God is false in the sense of a fiction or an illusion. It is true because it refers to something real, but goes wrong in attributing to it qualities that make sense from a human point of view even though they do not really belong to it. Monism not monotheism is the only true account of the ultimate reality. All religions based on a personal view of God represent relative truth and contain an element of

falsification.⁶ Gandhi sometimes refers to the ultimate reality or God as 'it' and at other times in response to human limitations as 'He'.

For Gandhi, belief in God or the ordered moral governance of the universe lies at the heart of religion. All religions share it in one form or another but differ in their articulation of it. 'The soul of religion is one but it is encased in a multitude of forms.' Gandhi calls the latter formal, historical, or customary, and the former eternal, pure, or universal religion, or simply religion (with a capital 'R'). Religion in this basic sense underlies all religions, forms their common bond, and transcends but does not supersede them.

Since God is infinite and no religion can grasp him in his plentitude, different religions capture different aspects of him and build appropriate systems of beliefs and practices. They develop different ways of relating to him; different modes of pleasing, worshipping, and adoring him; different bodies of moral principles, rules, practices, and rituals; and different notions of heaven, hell, after life, and salvation. As a result, every religion has a distinct moral ethos and represents a unique spiritual composition. The emphasis on love is central to Christianity in a way that it is not to other religions, and so too are the related ideas of forgiveness, suffering, and human brotherhood. Rigorous monotheism, rejection of intermediaries between God and human beings, God's merciful nature, and the idea of human equality are uniquely and most beautifully articulated in Islam. The ideas of the unity of all life, non-violence, and the distinction between the impersonal and personal conceptions of God are fully developed in Hinduism, as are those of enlightenment and compassion in Buddhism. For Gandhi, religions are like maps of the same terrain from different angles, and it makes no sense to ask which of them is true or to assume that only one of them can be true.

For Gandhi, all religions grow out of and are centred on the unique spiritual experiences and insights of their founders. Each owes its origin to a moral and spiritual genius, an earnest and determined seeker after Truth, who led an exemplary moral life, received divine grace and guidance, and discovered some of the profoundest truths about human life and destiny. The power of these truths and the quality of his life drew others to him and, over time, became the basis of a new religion. Founders of religions are not Sons of God, prophets, or divine emissaries, for that involves an untenable anthropomorphic view of the

ultimate reality and ignores their humanity and inescapable limitations. Rather they are human beings stretching themselves to the fullest in order to grasp the ultimate reality, spiritual geniuses who are nevertheless human and subject to their share of human fallibility. While pushing beyond the limits of the culture in which they are born and raised, they cannot altogether avoid being shaped and conditioned by it.

A religion for Gandhi is neither a philosophical theory tying up all its beliefs and practices in a tightly structured logical system nor an authoritative and closed body of dogmas requiring uncritical conformity, but a moral and spiritual vision informed by a particular conception of God. Its truth lies in its vision, in its governing spirit and essential message, not in its rituals and detailed scriptural utterances. To belong to it is to commit oneself to its vision and live it to the best of one's ability. Since the vision is necessarily general, believers need to use their reason to interpret and apply it to their unique circumstances and situations.

For Gandhi, there is truth in every religion but none is wholly true or free of error.⁷ Although he is not clear, he seems to think that no religion is likely to be wholly false because they are all based on the spiritual experiences of their founders, capture some aspects of the ultimate reality however inadequate and confused their expressions might be, and enjoin at least some important moral values. Even as no religion is wholly false, none represents the Absolute Truth or offers a final and exhaustive account of the ultimate reality. Since every religion centres on a personal conception of the ultimate reality, it represents a relative truth, truth as grasped from the human point of view, and not the Absolute Truth. Even as far as the personal conception of God is concerned, every religion sees him from a particular point of view, stresses some qualities rather than others, and is necessarily selective. It is articulated in a manner and expressed in a language characteristic of the time and place of its birth, and carries the deep imprint of its historical and cultural roots.

It might be argued that these limitations do not apply to those religions in which God reveals himself through his chosen medium and which, being free of human mediation, are pure and perfect. Gandhi rejects this view on several grounds. First, it implies that God reveals himself only in one religion or to one community, and accuses him of partiality and favouritism. Second, since several religions make such a

claim, we have no non-circular way of deciding whose claim to accept.⁸ Third, contrary to what their adherents believe, divine revelation can never be free from cultural and other mediations. It is expressed in an inherently imperfect human language that can never fully and accurately convey transcendental truths. It is communicated through finite human beings whose cognitive capacities are necessarily limited, who are culturally conditioned, and who cannot therefore receive transcendental truths in their fullness. 'I believe that everything that the human hand touches, by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Being humanly mediated, all [religions] are imperfect and liable to error.'⁹

Finally, Gandhi maintains that the scriptures of even the revealed religions do not provide reliable accounts of their founders' teachings as they were composed or collated long after their death by disciples keen on exaggerating the qualities and achievements of their teachers and putting a particular gloss on their message. Since they also invariably include dubious empirical and historical material, everything in them is not divinely revealed, and we have to decide which bits are. Scriptures are not and cannot therefore be self-validating, and must be subjected to the tests of reason and experience.

Since no religion in Gandhi's view is perfect or represents the absolute truth, it benefits from a dialogue with others. The dialogue is possible because all religions spring from common human concerns, address common problems, and share a common vocabulary. And it is necessary because it serves several important purposes. It gives us access to the treasures of other religions and deepens our understanding of God and human life. It sensitizes us to the very different ways in which human beings seek to make sense of the world, widens our spiritual horizon, and helps us to see the strengths and limitations of our own. It enables us to counter the constant internal pressure towards homogeneity, break out of the closed worlds of organized religions, and to rise to a higher level from which to grasp their commonalities and differences. It takes us from religion to Religion, from the necessary but inevitably divisive and impure historical religions to religion in its true and purest state, and helps create a global spiritual community for which religions are not rivals but partners in a common quest.

For Gandhi, truly religious persons have one absolute commitment that overrides all others, to lead a life anchored in God. Their ultimate

loyalty is to God, not to any particular religion. While seeking to live by their religion, they appreciate that other religions too have their treasures, which they should draw upon in their constant concern to increase their understanding of the divine. They neither merely tolerate other religions in a spirit of resignation or condescension nor just respect them with its associated ideas of distance and relative indifference, but show them positive *sadbhāva* or good will and wish them and their followers well. Just as one cherishes and enjoys the literary and artistic creations of other civilizations without the slightest unease, a truly religious person values the presence of and draws spiritual nourishment from religious diversity.

Even as a truly religious person values dialogue with other religions, he values it within his own. For Gandhi, every human being is unique, endowed with a distinct *swabhāva* or psychological and spiritual constitution made up of particular tendencies, dispositions, temperament, and habits of thought. What persuades, fulfils, or attracts one person might not convince or satisfy another. Since no two individuals ever think and feel alike, adherents of a religion are bound to interpret its central doctrines differently and live by them in their own different ways. Such differences are an inescapable part of it and deserve respect. By its very nature, a religious community is not and should not aspire to be a monolithic unit but rather a loose and open fellowship of free and self-determining individuals held together by their broad commitment to and ongoing conversation about the meaning of its central truths.

Gandhi goes further and argues that although every historical religion is constructed around its founder, it does not have the monopoly of the latter. Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and others belong to humankind, and their teachings are a common human heritage. Christ transcends Christianity, is not exhausted in it, and may sometimes need to be freed from its straitjacket.¹⁰ One may admire and follow his message without being a Christian, as Christianity or more accurately the Christian religion is a historically specific way of interpreting and appropriating him.¹¹ The failure to separate the two is a source of much confusion and mischief. It inhibits non-Christians from revering Christ and following part or even the whole of his teachings, and Christians from showing similar veneration to the founders of other religions. It also encourages the aggressive practice of conversion. For Christian missionaries, whoever admires or is attracted to Christ is a

target for conversion and should be brought within the fold. Gandhi thinks the opposite should be the case. Missionaries may rightly carry the message of Christ to non-Christians, but their aim should not be to convert them but rather to encourage them to borrow what they like in Christ's teachings without abandoning their own religion unless they themselves feel a strong urge to do so. When his close associate Madeleine Slade wanted to become a Hindu, Gandhi saw no need for it and suggested that she should instead adopt and integrate into her religion whatever she liked in Hinduism.

Gandhi pressed the argument further, and suggested that the conventional definition and classification of religion should be radically reconsidered. A Hindu who is attracted to the message of Christ and integrates parts of it into his religion is not a Christian in the conventional sense of the term. Yet he lives a Christ-inspired life and loves him as much as the latter's avowed followers do. There is no good reason why he may not call himself a follower of Christ, even a christian (with a small 'c') though perhaps not a Christian. Indeed it is possible that although he does not formally subscribe to Christian doctrines in a way that self-proclaimed Christians do, his way of life might embody Christ's teaching better than theirs. For Gandhi, he is a better follower of Christ and closer to him in spirit than they are. The conventional view of religion emphasizes not the founder but a historically specific tradition built around him, and views it as an exclusive and self-contained whole. Since Gandhi takes the opposite view, he rejects the traditional definition and classification of religions. There are several ways of following Christ, the traditional Christian way being only one of them. And a Christian does not cease to be one by drawing on other religions. All religious boundaries are arbitrary and restrictive, useful devices for formal and socially convenient self-identification but ultimately too simplistic to convey the richness of religious life.

Gandhi's view of religion leads him to argue that every religion should satisfy four basic conditions, and has 'less of religion' or a truly religious spirit to the extent that it fails to do so. First, it should emphasize the quality of life its adherents should lead rather than the theological beliefs they should hold. Beliefs are important only in so far as they inspire and nurture the good life, and a religious life should be judged not by the intensity and fervour of one's beliefs but rather by one's ability to embody its central values in one's life. As Gandhi puts

it, '[a]mong agents of the many untruths that are propounded in the world, one of the foremost is theology... But even those who have to do with theology as part of their work have to survive their theology. I know two good Christians who gave up theology and decided to live the gospel of Christ.'¹²

Second, since human beings are unique, see the world from their distinct perspectives and have different spiritual needs and aspirations, every religion should respect the resulting diversity of views and conduct. To insist that its followers should all subscribe to an identical interpretation of their religion and conduct themselves accordingly is to violate their spiritual freedom and integrity and encourage hypocrisy and falsehood.

Third, since no religion can represent the divine in all its infinitude and express the whole truth about him, it should open up itself to a transformative encounter with others and respect its adherents' freedom to borrow what they find valuable in them. A religion that denies or severally restricts this freedom for fear of diluting or undermining its identity exercises an unacceptable degree of spiritual coercion and turns itself into a virtual prison.

Finally, since God suffuses and sustains the universe and everything in it bears his imprint, all human beings are sacred, inviolable, equal, and part of a single human family. The natural world too deserves to be approached in a spirit of reverence and cosmic piety. A religion that encourages violence and hatred, treats some groups as subhuman, or views the natural world as mere raw material to be exploited for human greed is guilty of 'sin against God'. As Gandhi puts it, 'the greater the scope for compassion in a way of life, the more religion it has'.¹³

In Gandhi's view no religion meets all four criteria, though some come out better on some of these than do others. Hinduism, for example, does quite well by the first and reasonably well by the third, but extremely poorly by the fourth criterion as its respect for non-human life is passive and shallow, and its caste hierarchy and practice of untouchability are blatant violations of the principles of equality and human unity. Christianity, in Gandhi's view, does reasonably well by the fourth criterion but less well by the rest. It displays a strong spirit of human dignity and brotherhood but takes a largely instrumental view of the non-human world. In the early years it rightly stressed the centrality of conduct but later it was taken over by theology, was

over-intellectualized, and became obsessed with doctrinal conformity. Since it makes absolutist claims, it takes a condescending view of other religions and rules out a meaningful interaction with them. Gandhi analyses Buddhism, Jainism, and other religions along similar lines and points to their strengths and limitations. Since religions are judged by several criteria, they cannot be graded on a single scale or judged better or worse overall.¹⁴

Gandhi's life and thought provide an excellent example of the transformative effect of inter-religious dialogue. He was born and raised as a Hindu and strove to live up to what he took to be its central values.¹⁵ As he reflected on it and got to know other religions, he saw its inadequacies and borrowed some of their values and insights. He thought that the traditional Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain view of non-violence was largely negative, passive, and limited to not doing harm to others. In this respect, he found Christianity deeply appealing, and took over its emphasis on love, active service of one's fellow humans, and the power of suffering. He, however, felt that Christian love, especially as exemplified by the Crucifixion of Christ, had a strong emotional content, turned love into a passion, and disturbed inner calm. He redefined it in the light of the Hindu ideal of non-attachment, and arrived at the idea of active love that deeply cared for others without losing its distance and detachment. Gandhi similarly combined the traditional Hindu practice of fasting as a form of protest with the Judaic idea of representative leadership and the Christian concepts of victorious atonement and suffering love, interpreted each in the light of the others, and developed the novel idea of 'voluntary crucifixion of the flesh'. It involved a fast undertaken by a deeply loved leader of the community to atone for the evil deeds of his followers, awaken their sense of shame and guilt, and to mobilize their moral and spiritual energies for redemptive purposes.

Gandhi's ecumenically oriented Hinduism intrigued his Christian friends and alarmed many of his fellow Hindus. The former could not understand why he had stopped half way and not converted to Christianity, whereas the latter accused him of corrupting their religion by introducing alien Christian values. In their own different ways, both were obsessed with boundaries, and Gandhi thought little of either. He told his Christian friends that Christ was not a Christian monopoly and that he did not have to become a Christian to follow some of

his teachings. He said further that while admiring Christianity, he also disapproved of some of its basic doctrines and that although critical of some Hindu beliefs, he shared its basic vision of human life.

As for his Hindu critics, some of whom were so offended that Shankaracharya once even organized a signature campaign asking the colonial government to declare him a non-Hindu, Gandhi rejoined that his so-called Christianization of their religion was nothing of the kind. Like the Buddha and Mahavir whom the Hindus revered and many of whose ideas they had absorbed, Christ was a universal figure and not a Christian monopoly. Borrowing some aspects of his vision enriched Hinduism by introducing values it lacked and made it a better religion. Gandhi also argued that as a seeker of truth, his freedom to learn from other religions could not be abridged in the name of doctrinal conformity. Indeed Hinduism prided itself in giving its adherents the maximum freedom to borrow from other religions, and he was being true to it in wanting to do so.¹⁶

Some Observations

I have outlined Gandhi's views on the nature and importance of inter-religious dialogue. His case for dialogue does not depend on whether or not he has made a convincing case for a belief in the existence of God or for religion as an epistemologically valid form of thought. Even if the answer to the latter is in the negative, the fact remains that religions exist, command the deepest allegiance and loyalty of millions, and need to live in harmony and engage in a meaningful dialogue with each other. While many advocate dialogue on prudential grounds, Gandhi's novelty lies in doing so on religious grounds and giving it a transformative orientation.

Gandhi's case rests on religious pluralism and the concomitant rejection of religious monism and relativism. For a religious monist, only one religion is true. Since it possesses the truth, it has no reason to engage in a dialogue with others. Indeed since they are all assumed to be mistaken, one has a God-given duty to convert their followers. For a religious relativist, every religion is a self-sufficient whole, valid in its own terms, true for those who commit themselves to it, incapable of being judged from outside it, and hence a dialogue with others is both impossible and pointless. Gandhi rightly rejects both.

Religious monism is misguided because there is no non-circular way of establishing a religion's claim to be the only true religion. Since all are humanly mediated, none, not even the revealed ones, can claim to be free of error and the best. And since different religions view the divine differently and grasp its different aspects, they are incommensurable and cannot be graded on a single scale. As for religious relativism, Gandhi is again right to argue that no religion can be a self-contained whole and immune to external judgement. Although it necessarily involves a leap of faith, it is subjected to the non-relativist criteria of reason and experience and must stay within their bounds if it is to command respect. Since every religion prescribes moral ideals and values, we may also rightly ask if they are consistent with known facts about human beings, nurture human life, respect their common humanity, and conduce to peaceful relations with fellow human beings. Furthermore, the insights of a religion are not its private property but a universal human possession, and all who feel attracted to them are and should be free to adopt them.

Gandhi's religious pluralism is not based on the instrumental view that since religious plurality is a fact of life, we should accept it as the only way to ensure peace and order, nor on the sceptical view that since we have no means of adjudicating their claims, we should accept all religions as more or less equally valid. Rather it rests on the view that given human imperfection, no religion can in principle represent the full and final truth about the divine, that each articulates a particular vision with its strengths and limitations, and that they can overcome the latter and deepen their understanding of the divine only by means of an open-minded and open-hearted dialogue conducted in a spirit of humility. Religions in this view do not mutely exist side by side within their zealously guarded boundaries. Rather they are driven by their inner *telos* to reach out to others as part of their unending spiritual quest.

For Gandhi, a religious tradition is best seen as an inspirational moral and spiritual resource to be creatively explored rather than an authoritative and closed system of beliefs demanding obedience, as an inescapably partial vision of transcendence rather than its final and exhaustive account. Both these views of it and the tensions they create are to be found in all religious traditions including the revealed ones. The hold of the exclusivist and absolutist view is weakening as evident

in the growing openness to dialogue and interfaith movements found in all religions including the Catholic Christianity and Islam, but it is still fairly strong as seen in the resistance and anxieties this provokes.¹⁷ Although there is no conclusive way of refuting it, as it involves faith and commitment, Gandhi gives good reasons why it is unsatisfactory and deserves to be radically reconsidered.

FRIENDSHIP IN CLASSICAL INDIAN THOUGHT*

Friendship is a unique form of human relationship differing from all others in several important respects. Unlike those between parents and children or siblings, it is not based on the ties of blood. This is not to say that parents and children or brothers and sisters cannot be friends but rather that their relationship has an internal dynamics that often affects the quality of such friendship as develops between them. Parents, for example, cannot share their innermost thoughts and feelings with their children for fear of creating what Montaigne calls an 'unsuitable familiarity'¹ and weakening their respect, and children cannot 'administer admonitions and corrections' to their parents as friends do without overstepping the norms of propriety.

Further, friendship is a voluntary relationship. Unlike neighbours, colleagues, fellow citizens, and co-religionists who are such by virtue of external factors, friendship is a result of the individual's own choices and efforts and a matter of slow growth. The parties concerned are aware of their developing relationship and decide whether or not to let it grow. Friendship is their free creation and entirely dependent on what they care to make of it. It takes whatever form they choose to give it, has such content and depth as they put into it, and expresses their individuality to a much greater degree than most other human relationships. Since it is not dependent on anything outside it, though

*This chapter draws on some ideas first developed in my 'An Indian View of Friendship', *The Changing Face of Friendship*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

the latter may sometimes help or hinder it, friendship represents one of the purest and freest of all human relationships. Being self-standing and voluntary, it is paradoxically both fragile and tenacious, capable of ending at any time as well as lasting a lifetime.

Unlike many other relationships, friendship is open-ended and admits of degrees. One person is 'just' a friend; another a 'good' friend; yet another a 'close' or 'intimate' friend, a 'fast' friend as Indians call it. Friendship covers a large spectrum ranging from a perceptible degree of warmth and goodwill to a near total merger of two selves, and often occupies a place somewhere between the two. Unlike many other relations, friendship presupposes that those involved acknowledge its existence in appropriate ways and are broadly agreed on what it entails. A person can be my neighbour, brother, fellow citizen, or even father without my knowing it but not my friend. We are friends only when we acknowledge and recognize each other as such and behave towards each other in what we both consider to be an appropriate manner.

Friendship has both an emotional and a moral dimension. Friends are attached to each other, enjoy each other's company, and miss each other. They also care for each other, promote each other's well-being, and help each other in times of need. The two dimensions are related. Friends help each other not because this is what moral beings should do but as an expression of their mutual affection and commitment, and they are not just fond of each other as any two human beings can be but in a way that generates certain moral expectations and obligations.

Although both these constitutive elements of friendship are important, they do not neatly map on to each other. One might care deeply for a friend, trust him fully, and make unsolicited sacrifices for him but find him rather dull, too quiet for one's taste, not one with whom one would want to spend a weekend or go on a holiday. Conversely, one might find another a great company and be very fond of him but not repose the same degree of deep trust in him, open up to him fully, and feel the same level of moral commitment. This is not a difference in levels or degrees of friendship but rather in its forms. Emotional attachment or fondness and moral commitment do not fully coincide because they have related but different bases. The former arises from shared interests, habits, temperament, and an elusive mental chemistry; the latter from such things as past acts of kindness, length of relationship, favours received at critical times, and the kind of sacrifices they involved. Depending on which of these two is its dominant element, friendship takes different forms.

In the light of our discussion, friendship is only possible under certain conditions of which the following are the most important. First, society should not structure, formalize, and regulate all human relations and should leave space for such informal, open-ended, and self-generated relations as friendship and romantic love. Second, individuals should be able and willing to rise above their socially defined roles; embark on the adventure of creating new and unpredictable relations; and share their innermost thoughts, feelings, and vulnerabilities with others. Third, they should have the patience, the constancy of contact, and the relatively autonomous space needed for a slowly maturing relationship, and the capacity and the disposition to establish non-calculative relations with each other. Finally, since friendship involves partiality and preference as the basis of its internal morality, it presupposes that they are valued, respected, accommodated, or at least not positively condemned by the prevailing moral code.

These and related conditions do not obtain in all societies, and hence friendship is not a universal phenomenon.² Some societies, such as the tribal, rigidly structure all human relationships and have at best only a limited space for friendship. If a relationship resembling friendship develops, as it well might, it is subsumed under and structured in terms of some other socially prescribed relationship and denied its own internal rhythm. At the other extreme, some highly individualistic modern societies prize privacy, self-containment, and the jealously guarded boundary of the self, and make ample space for and encourage friendship but not beyond the point where it involves abandoning self-control, displaying one's vulnerability and compromising one's autonomy, especially among men. Some such as the totalitarian societies deeply fear and frown on pockets of intense loyalty that friendship creates, and favour instead the collectivist ethos of comradeship based on selfless dedication to a common public cause. Many religious communities discourage friendship because it detracts from the love of God and breeds deep worldly attachments. For the Stoics, the wise man is self-sufficient and has no friends, and Kant has difficulty reconciling friendship with the principle of universal impartiality. Benjamin Constant calls it *egoism a deux* and thinks that it makes friends self-absorbed and neglect their duties to others. For Mahatma Gandhi, close friendship in the sense of 'exclusive intimacies' stands in the way of universal love and spiritual growth, and hence 'he who would be friends with God must remain

alone or make the whole world his friend'.³ In this chapter, I inquire if Indian thinkers identified a form of relationship broadly analogous to that of friendship as we generally understand it and was described earlier, how they analysed its nature and structure, and what value they placed on it.

Indian thinking on the subject goes as far back as the Rig Veda composed around 1000 BCE, which developed the basic vocabulary for articulating the nature and different forms of friendship. The subject was further explored in the Buddhist and Jain writings, where it was heavily moralized, as well as in such texts as the two epics, the Purāṇās, and the classical literary works of Kalidasa, Bana, Bhavabhuti, and others. *Panchatantra*, a collection of 84 stories composed around 200 BCE, called friendship a 'great prize' of human life and illustrated both its necessity and rarity through several concrete examples. Since I cannot trace the development of such a long and rich tradition, I shall mostly though not exclusively concentrate on the two epics.

I do so for several reasons. It gives the discussion a manageable unity and focus. The epics also have the great advantage that they discuss friendship not in abstract philosophical terms but in the context of concrete human relationships and explore its complexity and morality in vivid detail. Although they were composed many centuries ago and are in that sense dated, they have been reverentially read and reinterpreted by millions, have deeply influenced classical and vernacular literature, and remain an abiding popular source of moral inspiration and norms. They were widely discussed and became a source of political and cultural inspiration during the Indian struggle for Independence. Several years ago they were serialized on the television, the Rāmāyana for 78 weeks and the Mahābhārata for over 90. Each instalment lasted for nearly three-quarters of an hour, was regularly watched by millions of Indians, mostly Hindus but also of other religions, and brought most of the country to a standstill. Their ideas on friendship continue to influence the current Indian view and practice of it, and are not at all a historical curiosity.⁴

Two further points of clarification are in order. No discussion of friendship in the Indian context can overlook the way in which it was shaped by the pervasive reality of caste. During the period the epics were composed, caste was not as rigidly structured and as strong a determinant of social relations as it later became and is now increasingly

ceasing to be the case. It is striking that such divine incarnations as Rama and Krishna were non-Brahmins, as were some of the great sages, and that some notable thinkers were products of inter-caste marriages or liaisons. Although the dominant culture formally disapproved of friendship between the higher and lower castes, such friendship did develop in practice and was discussed in the literature; for example, that between Karna and Duryodhana in the *Mahābhārata* and between Rama and Sugriva in the *Rāmāyana*. Panchatantra even says that a 'friend in need is a friend indeed, although of a different caste'. Although such unconventional friendships had their own peculiar dialectic, much of what I shall say about friendship applies to them as well.

Most examples of friendship in the two epics and other religious and literary texts relate to men. Friendships between men and women are discussed but they are either between two lovers or between husband and wife as in the case of Kalidasa's *Meghdut* and *Ajavilāp* where the separated husband desperately misses his wife whom he calls his friend. The intriguing relationship between Krishna and Draupadi is full of subtle hints that it is more complex than appears to be the case.⁵ As for friendships between women, they too are noted and analysed in the classical literature. Female friendships are generally presented as more intimate, reliable, and durable; more easily made; and less self-conscious and status-based than those between men. However, in most other respects they are like male friendships. Although I concentrate on the latter, my observations apply to female friendships as well, albeit with some qualifications.

Levels and Forms of Friendship

Almost from the very beginning, the Indian discussion of friendship took place at two levels, metaphysical and social. At the metaphysical level, Indian thinkers asked what should be the proper human orientation, disposition, or attitude (*bhāva*) towards the rest of the universe. In contrast to the anthropocentric and theocentric views of the world dominant in the West, most Indian thinkers took a cosmocentric view of it. For them, the natural world was an internally articulated and ordered whole whose constituents were all its 'co-tenants' enjoying the right to exist and avail themselves of its resources. Human beings therefore had a duty of friendliness and goodwill (*maitri*) towards each other

as well as other orders of being. Rather than grudge their existence or destroy them in pursuit of their narrowly defined species-interests, they were enjoined to cherish them and take delight in the infinite beauty and diversity of the natural world. A remarkable prayer in *Sukla Yajurvedā* reads: *Mitrasyāham caksusā sarvāni bhutāni samikse* (I look upon all living beings with the eyes of a friend). In *Taittiriya Samhita*, the author wishes 'peace' and declares his goodwill to earth, trees, plants, rivers, and all sentient beings. As the *Mahābhārata* puts it, 'he verily knows the substance of dharma who is always the friend of all'. And the *Gitā* talks of *suhradām sarvabhootānām* (good will to all living beings). Friendliness or friendly disposition to all living beings involves non-violence (*ahimsā*), meaning not just doing them no harm but the absence of a wish to do so. As Vyasa says it in one of his *Bhasyas*, it is *sarvathā sarvadā sarvabhutānām anabhidroha* (absence of hostility to all beings, in every way, at all times). In Indian thought, no human being is a complete stranger to whom one can be wholly indifferent. Not surprisingly, Sanskrit has very few words for strangers.

While being oriented to all living beings in a spirit of friendliness, the individual also stands in a special relationship of friendship with particular individuals. Indian thinkers identified three major forms or rather levels of friendship-like relations on the basis of their depth and degree of involvement. Following the vocabulary first developed in the *Rig Veda*, they called them *maītri*, *sauhārda*, and *sakhya*, and those involved *mitra*, *suhrd*, and *sakhā*. Although their usage was not consistent, for they sometimes used the three terms interchangeably or subsumed them under the generic term 'maītri', most of them were sensitive to their differences and used them to describe different levels of friendship.⁶

The term 'maītri' refers to the most elementary level of friendship and is more like an alliance. As Shankaracharya says in his *Gitābhāshya*, it is based on mutual usefulness and is largely instrumental in nature. Two individuals might come together out of self-interest or because they are engaged in a common enterprise (*ekakriya*) whose success depends on their willing cooperation. Their friendship lasts as long as it serves their shared purpose and is as strong as their commitment to the latter. They have no direct or personal bonds, and their relations are limited in their depth and extent.

As they continue to interact, they might develop common interests, experiences, and memories, and might even begin to like each other.

That introduces a wholly new dimension in their relationship and makes it friendship, properly so called. In the Rāmāyana, when Rama first met Sugriva in the course of his search for Sita, the two eyed each other warily and asked what each could do for the other. As Rama says, 'our friendship will develop and last because we need each other'. As each fulfilled his part of the bargain and they worked together, they began to like each other and developed bonds that transcended considerations of self-interest and reciprocity. When Bharat welcomes Rama and his associates at the end of the war, he calls Sugriva a dear friend and a brother (*tvamasmākam chaturṇām tu bhrātā Sugriva panchamah*).⁷

Suhrd represents this second level of friendship and is based on the 'bonding of hearts'. Those involved are suhrd or 'good-hearted' towards each other and bound by mutual affection. As Bharat says in the Rāmāyana, '*sauhradāj jāyate mitram apakāroritlaksanam*' (from good-heartedness is born friendship; harm is the sign of enmity).⁸ Friends feel and care for each other and delight in each other's company. Their hearts have 'come closer' and communicate with or speak to each other (*hridaya samvād*). In the classical Indian literature, the heart is both the seat of feeling and a medium of instinctive understanding, and has an epistemic significance. A charioteer who knows the moods and understands the movements of his horses is said to have the heart of the horse (*ashvahriday*). Friends understand each other without speaking and anticipate each other's moods and thoughts.

Individuals can become suhrds in various ways. Shared childhood or adolescence or important life experiences is one of the most common. The relation between Krishna and Sridama is an excellent example of this. The two had grown up together, gone to the same school, enjoyed the same activities, and were quite close to each other. When they met after years of losing contact, they resumed their friendship as if their separation had made no difference. Although their abilities, wealth, social status, and power were vastly unequal, and they had little to say to each other, they had many shared memories and great mutual affection with which to revitalize their friendship.

Another way individuals become suhrds is through shared activities and the sense of gratitude generated by acts of mutual kindness. Karna, an illegitimate child abandoned at birth by Kunti, was found and raised by a lower-caste couple. All his life, he suffered the stigma and humiliation of a *sutaputra*. Duryodhana recognized his talents,

thought he would be useful one day, accepted him as an ally, and made him the king of Anga and thus a nominal Kshatriya. Over time, the two became great friends. During the great war when Krishna, and then Kunti, revealed to him his real identity and tried to persuade him to abandon Duryodhana in favour of the Pandavas, Karna rejected their overtures. Not Kunti but his foster mother who had raised and nurtured him was his 'true' mother. More importantly, Duryodhana had done him great 'favours' (*upkār*), given him his pride and self-respect, and placed him under a 'deep debt of gratitude'. He had also shown him affection and asked for nothing in return but 'just my heart' which 'has been in his keeping ever since'. As a result 'my heart is not mine to give you, it belongs to my friend Duryodhana'. To betray him was *anritam*, untruth, sinful, and Karna could not possibly entertain such a thought.

Sakhya refers to the third and highest level of friendship. It involves mutual commitment, identification, and love amounting to the substantial fusion or overlapping of selves. A *sakhā* is *bahisprāna* or *prānobahishchara* (external self or one's self located outside oneself).⁹ Those involved are *samaprāna*, share a common self or life-breath. Each draws his energy from and partly lives in and through the other, with neither able to live a full life on his own. As Bhavabhuti says in *Uttarrāmcharita*, 'You are my sakhā because we are not separate, whatever is mine is also yours' (*tasmāt sakhā tvamasi yanmama tat-tavaiva*). While suhrd involves bonding of hearts, sakhya involves that of selves or the whole being without either party losing their sense of individuality. This kind of mutual identification is considered possible only between those sharing a common orientation to the world, character, values, and interests (*samānashilvyasanesu sakhyam*), and is often forged through common struggles and difficulties.

The best example of sakhya is the friendship between Krishna and Arjuna in the Mahābhārata. As the former says, 'Let it be understood that Arjuna is one half of my body' (*sharirādhe mama Arjuna*), and that they are really 'one self that has been made twofold'. Arjuna expresses a similar sentiment.¹⁰ In the Mahābhārata, the two are inseparable. They have much fun together; they fight, plot, and conspire together; adore, love, and care for each other; and instinctively understand each other's feelings, moods, and thoughts. Krishna helps Arjuna elope with his sister Subhadra against the opposition of his family. He tells occasional

lies and even breaks his vows in order to protect Arjuna in difficult situations. The two will give up anything for each other, including the bliss of heaven (*Krishna dhananjayasyārthe swargam api parityajet, tathaiiv Pārtha Krishnārthe pranānan api parityajet*).¹¹

When Krishna fears that Arjuna might not be able to keep his pledge to kill Jayadratha before sunset the following day, he does not wish to live in a world in which Arjuna is absent and decides to break his pledge not to engage in active combat himself. He acts as Arjuna's charioteer during the great war, a job involving not only a high risk and a low status but also an instinctive understanding of the plans, strategies, fears, and thoughts between the warrior and his charioteer.¹² Later on, when he realizes that he is nearing the moment of his death, his last wish is to see Arjuna and relieve his likely distress. Krishna summons him in a telepathic encounter, bids him a most affectionate farewell, and consoles him with the thought that once a man's purpose in life is achieved, he should not only accept but welcome and even invite death. In the *Mahābhārata*, the friendship between the two men is said to be so close that they are described as 'aspects (*amsa*) of one another', as 'really one self or each other's *ātmā*' (*ātmā hi pārthe Krishnasya, Krishnorātmā Kiritinah*). The *Karnaparvan* refers to them repeatedly with an air of mystery as 'two Krishnas', and Karna speaks of 'having seen the two Krishnas together on one chariot'.

In the Indian thought, God can be conceptualized and worshipped in several ways, *sakhā* or close friend being one of them. Indeed *sakhyabhakti* is generally viewed as the second best form of *bhakti*. The devotee sees God as his *sakhā* and the latter does the same. Each is devoted to and reaches out to the other, and loves and misses him. Their relation is marked by absolute trust and commitment and involves mutual dependence and *ekrupatā* or identification. In *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, when Durvasa gets angry with Ambarisha, Narayan or God saves the latter saying, 'I belong to my *bhaktas* (devotees). They have renounced everything and have chosen me as their sole companion. In return I have sworn that I will never abandon them. Their sorrow is my sorrow, and their happiness mine. This is why I am called *bhaktaparārdhin* (dependent on or at the disposal of my devotees).' The idea of friendship between man and God is also found in other traditions, but it does not have the same meaning. In the Greek Old Testament and James' translation of the New Testament, Abraham is called a 'friend of God'

or one whom 'God chose for friend'. The word 'friend' here means a special object of love and neither signifies a playful and informal relationship nor involves mutuality that it does in the Indian tradition.

I have sketched three major levels of friendship or rather friendship-like relations in classical Indian thought. Of the three, the first, *maitri*, is largely instrumental in nature and more like an alliance than friendship. The other two represent friendship properly so called and can take a variety of forms. Whatever its form and degree of depth, friendship in the Indian discussion has three important components—namely, *ānanda* (joy or delight), *sahāy* (help), and *abhaya* (fearlessness or security). Friends delight in each other's presence and their shared activities.¹³ Their relationship is marked by playfulness, fun, agreeable, and relaxed conversation, disregard of social conventions, spontaneity, informality, and absence of structured expectations. In the *Mahābhārata*, Krishna and Arjuna often banter about their military and romantic adventures (*vikrantāni ratāni cha*), get drunk and sometimes behave outrageously, as do Duryodhana and Karna.

Since friends care for each other, they render useful services to each other and make uncalculating sacrifices of time, energy, money, and even life. The classical Indian view of friendship has a strong practical orientation and makes mutual help its touchstone. Krishna is a true friend because he readily obliges Sridama when he goes to him for help. Sugriva stands by Rama when the latter is desperately trying to rescue his wife. Karna stands by Duryodhana during the *Mahābhārata* war. And Krishna is always by Arjuna's side when the latter gets into trouble. If a friend does not help in times of need, he is not a true friend. And conversely, a stranger who helps in need acts like a friend and lays the basis of friendship. Unless there is a reason to believe that his help is motivated by ulterior considerations, his willingness to help suggests that he wishes one well. It is not the help *per se* but the assumption of underlying goodwill that betokens a desire for and invites the reciprocal response of friendship.

Friendship also involves absence of fear. In the *Mahābhārata*, Krishna describes Karna as *mitrānamabhayamkarakah*, one who makes his friends fearless.¹⁴ The same idea is expressed in Bhartrihari's *Nitishetak*. The concept of fearlessness (*abhaya*) is subtle and complex. It implies not only that friends have nothing to fear from each other and that they can count on each other's help against hostile outsiders but also, and

more importantly, that when their friendship comes under severe strain or ceases, they can rest assured that they will not divulge information obtained during their friendship or behave as if they had never been friends. This is a recurrent theme in the various stories of *Panchatantra*. The *Hitopadesha* puts it well: 'If a friendship breaks, a true friend's feelings towards that former friend undergo no change, as a lotus stalk, though cut, holds its shape.' Friendship is supposed to entail a minimum lifelong commitment. While it may be loosened, suspended, or even ended, it may never be 'broken' and the obligations incurred during the course of it violated. Kautilya says that he who on ceasing to be a friend betrays or takes advantage of his friend's past confidences is a *kumitra*, a traitor to the 'truth' of friendship and deserving of the severest censure. For Bhavabhuti, *mitradharma* involves loving one's friend as oneself, loyalty in adversity, never disclosing his secrets, and discouraging him from committing evil.

Since friendship was highly valued in classical Indian thought, it was sometimes ritualized and given a sacred status. The Rāmāyana refers to a ceremony (*maitrividhi*) in which Rama and Sugriva confirm their friendship by shaking hands, going round the fire, and pledging mutual fidelity. In another such ceremony, Ravana asks Vali to confirm their commitment to lifelong friendship (*chiram sakhyam*) before the sacred fire. In the traditional marriage ceremony, one of the steps in *saptapadi* involves the newly wedded couple going round the fire and promising mutual friendship.

Some religious texts even introduced the remarkable concept of *mitradroha* (betraying a friend) and called it a *pāpa* (sin). In the Gitā's opening chapter, Krishna says that *mitradroha cha pāpakam*. When Rama wonders if Sugriva would be a true friend and help him as promised after Vali's death, he says that when those who betray their friends die, even the crows do not eat their flesh (*tan mritān api krivya kri-taghnan na upabhujate*).¹⁵ According to Manusmṛiti, a person guilty of betraying a friend is barred from participating in a *shrāddha* ceremony which involves offering oblations to dead ancestors; killing a friend is as much a sin as giving false evidence in a court of law or reviling the Vedās; engaging in sex with a friend's wife is as much a sin as that with one's sister; and when an intimate friend dies, the impurity lasts for a whole day.¹⁶ According to the *Vishnu Purāna*, those guilty of betraying friends invariably go to hell.

Like the conscientious discharge of one's obligations in other human relations, that to one's friend is supposed to earn spiritual merit. Indeed, one who has always been true to his friends acquires spiritual power that can be as great as that obtained through an austere penance. In the Mahābhārata, when Arjuna is about to kill the indomitable Karna with an arrow suggestively entitled *anjalika* (a respectful tribute), he puts all his spiritual merit behind it including that acquired from loyalty to friends. Uttering *satyakriyā* (an act of truth), he says, 'If I have sincerely practised all the austerities, pleased the gurus, and heard only good things about my friends—by that truth let this arrow slay my foe Karna.' (*Tapo 'sti taptam guruvasca tosita mayā yadistam suhrdam tathā srutam*).¹⁷ Many cultures value friendship as highly as the Indian, but it is perhaps unique in giving it a spiritual and even a quasi-religious status.¹⁸

Dilemmas of Friendship

Although friendship was a greatly valued human relationship in classical Indian thought, it was perceived to stand in the way of two of the highest Indian ideals. It involved attachment to and emotional engagement with particular individuals, and conflicted with the ideal of non-attachment or emotional self-sufficiency (*anāsakti*). It also involved partiality to friends, privileging their claims over the equally strong or stronger claims of others, and militated against the principle of impartiality or equal regard for all 'be they friends or foes' (*samdarshi* or *tulya maitrāripakshayah*). This raised the question about the proper place of friendship in human life and whether those committed to the highest form of moral and spiritual life should have friends.¹⁹

In much of the Indian thought it was argued that although the life based on emotional attachment and partiality was morally inferior to that devoted to emotional self-sufficiency, detachment, and impartiality, it had both an intrinsic and an instrumental value. It lay at the heart of and sustained the family, the clan, and the wider society. It also cultivated and nurtured important virtues such as loyalty, mutual concern, and self-sacrifice, and was a source of much joy and happiness in life. More importantly, it was the only way of life the vast majority of human beings desired and had the moral and emotional capacity to lead. Despite its moral limitations, friendship thus occupied a valuable place in human life and deserved respect.

For those who aspired to and had the capacity to lead the life of self-sufficiency and universal impartiality, friendship was a hindrance and should be avoided. Yudhishtira is a good example of this. As *Dharmarāj* or *Dharmāvatāra* (the embodiment of dharma), he scrupulously discharged his duties to all and showed them equal goodwill but was attached to or particularly fond of none. He had no friends though he was friendly to all. He had brothers whom he loved equally with the rest and a wife he cared for but to whom he was not attached or partial. When Yaksha promised to revive one of his four dead brothers, he chose his stepbrother Nakula so that his stepmother too may have a surviving son. He would not tell a lie to save even his own brothers from a grave danger. And when he ascended to heaven, the fate of his stray but loyal dog mattered as much to him as that of his brothers. This kind of life did not require renouncing the world. As Yudhishtira and Janaka showed, it could be lived within the framework of normal social relations.

Friendship also raised another problem. It had its dharma including the duty to help a friend in need. What if a friend made an unethical demand or could only be helped out by telling a lie, breaking a promise to a third party, or violating some such moral rule? The common answer in the Indian thought is to guard against this by choosing one's friends with great care. They should be persons of noble disposition and character, capable of discernment and good judgement, and not likely to get into difficult situations, make unacceptable demands, or take offence when these are not met. Indeed only such a friendship was enduring, hard to split, as flesh and finger nail, as the Panchatantra puts it. If a friend is evil, he will in one way or another 'bend you to his will', and such a friendship is 'quick to smash and hard to mend'.

Even among friends of good judgement and character, situations could arise when the duty of mutual help might involve morally dubious actions. For the Indian thinkers, no universal rule could help settle the matter. All moral actions were contextual and involved unique moral agents with their distinct history and personality. What was justified under one set of circumstances might not be under another, and what was right for one person might not be so for another. One's response to a friend's unethical demand therefore needed to take into account the depth of friendship, the nature of the demand, one's own nature, and the wider consequences of one's action. When, for example,

a friend is guilty of a grave misdeed and one's commitment to him is not deep and unconditional, one might decline to help him and even end the friendship. In Valmiki Rāmāyana, after rebuking and asking Ravana to return Sita, Vibhishana called his friends false friends, even foes, for acquiescing in his immoral action. If they were his true friends they should either tell him the truth and stop him from launching the impending war or leave him.

Krishna's relation to Arjuna was different. When the latter faced grave dangers because of his impetuosity, misjudgement, or misguided pledges, the Mahābhārata thinks that Krishna was right to help him out by telling occasional lies, breaking his promises, and even cheating. Their friendship was long and deep, the wider cause of winning the war was just, and Krishna's immortalities were relatively minor.

Karna's relation to Duryodhana was different from both. Duryodhana was engaged in an unjust war and had committed several misdeeds, and Karna should have left him. Instead he stayed loyal, killed many in the war, and himself died fighting. Despite some ambiguity, the basic view of the Mahābhārata is that he was right to do so. He did not share the view that the war was unjust. And although he disapproved of some of Duryodhana's actions, he thought these were relatively minor misdeeds. More importantly, he had over the years accumulated a deep debt of gratitude to him; the latter had made his war plans on that basis; and letting him down now would be the greatest form of betrayal. The fact that he had long been insulted and humiliated by Arjuna and avenging this had become his defining passion was also a factor to consider. He could not help being himself or go against the 'compulsions of his nature', which played a part in determining not only what he could but also should do.



Before concluding five important features of the classical Indian discussion of friendship are worth highlighting. First, friendship for it is one of the noblest of human relationships offering joy, love, security, and all else that makes human life rich and full. In the words of Panchatantra echoed in other texts, true friends 'taste the best of bliss... and find life's truest ends'. Nor surprisingly the tradition gives it a quasi-sacred status, allows it to trump the demands of many other human relations,

and condemns its subtle and crude forms of betrayal in the strongest terms. Since friendship demands so much from those involved, it is considered rare, a priceless prize worth striving for but achieved only by a few. While this is seen as an invitation to strive hard to develop true and deep friendship, it is also a warning that one should be realistic enough to recognize that most friendships will fall short of the ideal.

Second, while the Indian discussion is rich in examples and its detailed exploration of the different forms and dilemmas of friendship, more so than almost any other tradition, it is poorly theorized. There is no systematic analysis of the nature of friendship; the dilemmas it poses are not articulated and resolved in general theoretical terms; and the conceptual vocabulary is not carefully defined and elaborated. The absence of theoretical analysis is not unique to the discussion of friendship. It marks the treatises on social, economic, and political affairs, as well as with the result that India has a rich tradition of political and social thought but not theory.

Third, the Indian discussion says little about intellectual friendship regarded by Plato, Aristotle, and others as the purest, the highest, and even the only true and lasting form of friendship. This kind of friendship is based on a shared pursuit of truth and exchange of ideas and arguments. The Indian tradition is, of course, full of fascinating philosophical discussions, but these are either between the guru and his disciples or between the protagonists of different schools of thought and do not constitute the basis of friendship. If I am right, those more familiar with it need to explain why it does not give as much importance to the bonding of heads as to that of hearts.

Fourth, Aristotle, the first to systematically theorize friendship in the West, distinguishes three kinds of friendship, that based on pleasure, on utility or mutual benefit, and on virtue or moral excellence.²⁰ In the first two, friends are loved *for themselves*, for what they are and do; in the third, they are loved *in themselves*, for what is essential to their moral and human identity. For Aristotle, the third kind of friendship is the highest and most stable because it is based on the love of an impersonal and objective good. The friend here is loved not as a unique person but largely for the good he represents and instantiates. Aristotle makes moral development central to friendship and reduces the whole human person to his moral dimension. He also oversimplifies it and fails to see the important role that pleasure and mutual benefit play in

all relations of friendship including those based on virtue. The Indian discussion avoids some of these mistakes.

Finally, in the Indian thought, friendship does not seem to play the kind of epistemological role that it does in some others, especially the Greek. For Aristotle, friends reveal their innermost selves to and offer each other deeper self-knowledge. As he puts it in *Magna Moralia*,²¹ 'When we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking into the mirror; in the same way when we wish to know ourselves we can obtain that knowledge by looking at our friend.' Although this is implicit in seeing a friend as *bahisprāna* (externalized self), it does not receive much emphasis or even coherent articulation in the Indian tradition.

I hope to have shown in this essay that the classical Indian discussion of friendship offers fascinating insights into this most elusive and complex human relationship. Surprisingly, there has so far been no systematic study of it. Indeed I cannot easily think of even one significant book on the subject or a body of substantial articles. It is about time this rich tradition was retrieved, reconstructed, and critically appraised.²² Apart from being intrinsically valuable, such an exercise would offer a valuable clue to much of contemporary India's social and political life. Friendship is deeply valued in India, and the relations between individuals in all walks of life are shaped by their ideas on what they may or may not do to or for their friends. We cannot hope fully to understand their actions, be they private individuals, politicians, bureaucrats, or businessmen, without understanding, among other things, the influence of the traditional view of friendship.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Introduction

1. Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).
2. See Bhikhu Parekh, 'Some Reflections on the Hindu Tradition of Political Thought', in *Political Thought in Modern India*, eds Thomas Pantham and Kenneth Deutsch (New Delhi: SAGE, 1986).
3. In her meticulously researched but imbalanced book *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life* (London: I.B. Taurius, 2010), Kathryn Tidrick concentrates almost entirely on some of the strange religious beliefs Gandhi had picked up in London and South Africa without appreciating that hardly any of them survived his mature reflection. While later in the book she acknowledges that he never referred to them in his later life, she attributes it to his 'shrewdness' and political calculation rather than accept that he might have grown out of them. She discusses Gandhi's experiments in celibacy as many of us have done but gives them a degree of importance they do not have. They explain neither his moral and political thought nor any of his satyagrahas, which is what her book is supposed to be about and makes him an important figure worth studying in the first instance. She introduces touches of crudity at several places including when she reassures her readers on the basis of some pretty dubious assumptions that since Gandhi was willing to expose himself to his partners in celibacy experiments, he must have had 'genitals of at least normal size' (p. 313).
4. Gandhi and the Hindus in general are a deep disappointment to Perry Anderson who often deals with them through sweeping generalizations that are innocent of doubt and humility; see Perry Anderson, *The Indian Ideology*

(London: Verso, 2013). Freely issuing pontifical certificates of commendation and condemnation, he relies on Tidrick's 'first scrupulous account' of Gandhi's religious thought and repeats her mistakes, while adding several of his own. For example, capitalist property was not a 'sacred trust' for Gandhi who, in fact, rejected the very idea of exclusive ownership, and expected the owner to act as a publicly accountable guardian or trustee of his wealth and chided his capitalist friends for failing to do so. A man engaged in so many major debates could hardly be called a 'stranger' to intellectual exchange. And as he said on several occasions, his satyagrahas had larger objectives of capacity building and nation creating, and cannot be judged 'failures' on the basis of positivist and narrowly instrumental criteria.

It is surely perverse to say that Gandhi needed an 'assassin's bullet' to give him 'glory'. Einstein, Bonhoeffer, and others had recognized his stature nearly two decades before the assassin completed his job, and Martin Luther King and many others drew inspiration from his life and thought rather than his manner of death. Gandhi's profound impact on Hindu society and religion, inspirational leadership, and death-defying actions during the last years of his life had done more than enough to give him 'glory', of which he in fact thought little. Anderson's book is not devoid of valuable insights, but their force is undermined by his tone, air of superiority, and a lack of sympathy required to understand a complex man like Gandhi and a complex society like India, both of which fall outside his area of professional expertise and ways of thought.

Chapter I

1. The Upanishads contain several dialogues but no debates, and many of the former are largely concerned with points of clarification on questions raised by pupils.
2. Debates were considered important to determine the correct meaning of the central doctrines and to avoid what Vallabhacharya later called *tattvaviplava*.
3. *Gautama's Nyayasutras* (with *Vatsayana Bhāṣya*), trans. Ganganath Jha (Poone: Oriental Book Agencies, 1933).
4. For a most valuable discussion, see Esther Solomon, *Indian Dialectics: Methods of Philosophical Discussion* (Ahmedabad: B.J. Institute of Learning and Research, 1976), vols I and II. She is one of the earliest writers to talk of the 'argumentative Indian', an expression later popularized by Amartya Sen.
5. The head of the Srivaisnava sect based in Kanchipura is known as Prativādi Bhayankara Annangaracharyav Swami. This title was given to his ancestor in the fifteenth century, a doyen of Ramanuja's Vishistadvaita school, for defeating Narasimha Misra, a famous Advaita scholar. I thank Professor Kamla Ganesh of the University of Mumbai for this reference.

6. Jeannine Auboyer, *Daily Life in Ancient India: From 200 BC to 700 AD*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (London: Phoenix Press, 1965), p. 246. Bribing the judge or jury was not uncommon in some of these contests.
7. Solomon, *Indian Dialectics*, vol. 1, p. 119.
8. King Harsavardhana held a large religious assembly including 3,000 Buddhists of both the schools as well as many Brahmins, Nirgranthis, and others. They propounded their beliefs and responded to the objections of the followers of other schools.
9. Cited in Jay Manne, 'The Digha Nikāya Debates: Debating Practices at the Time of the Buddha', *Buddhist Studies Review*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1992, p. 123. Buddhists generally conducted philosophical discussions in parks on the edge of towns and called them *Kutuhāl Salas* or places for raising curiosity.
10. Manne, 'The Digha Nikāya Debates', p. 122.
11. Brian Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India* (Albany: Suny Press, 2007).
12. Kagola, a disciple of Uddalaka and not well versed in the Vedas, provoked a debate with Vardi, the court scholar of Mithila. He was defeated and made to drown himself in the sea. His son took the revenge by defeating Vardi, who too then drowned himself.
13. John Court, "'Intellectual Ahimsa' Revisited: Jain Tolerance and Intolerance of Others', *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2000.
14. D. Devahuti, *Harsh: A Political Study* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), Second Edition, p. 282. Heated debates took place between the followers of the Mahāyāna and Hinayana schools in the presence of several princes and thousands of devotees according to Hieuen Tsiang writing in 654 CE.
15. Cited in N.Q. Pankaj, *State and Religion in Ancient India* (Allahabad: Chugh Publication, 1983), p. 47.
16. Since philosophers spoke from within particular traditions or schools, they described themselves or were described by others accordingly: for example, Sankara the Vedantin, Nagarjuna the Buddhist, and Devsuri the Jain. The Brahmanic scholars were often referred to by the schools of the great āchāryas to which they belonged.
17. Different schools took over the epics, especially the Rāmāyana, and offered their own interpretations of them. The Jains called the Brahmins *Kusāstra-rādins* for 'falsifying' historical facts in the epics and telling 'silly stories and lies'. For them *rakshasas* were not demons but protectors (as in *raksā*) and Rāvana was a Jain who protected Jain shrines. Valmiki Rāmāyana was reworked very differently in the Jain and Jataka versions. Jināsena's *Harivamsa-purāna* was the Jain version of Mahābhārata. The Sramanic tradition did the same with other Brahmanic texts and stories. The result was both a shared literary heritage and its divergent interpretations, and

- anyone shaped by the Indian tradition was aware of both. See Romila Thapar, *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2013), pp. 213ff and 248ff.
18. Boundaries between different religions were relatively porous; for instance, Aśoka began as a Saivite and later became a Buddhist. Harsavardhana too was a Saivite and deeply sympathetic to Buddhism. Chandragupta Maurya, with Brahmanical sympathies, honoured Buddhism and Jainism, and later became a Jain ascetic.
 19. Jayanta Bhatta's philosophical play *Āgamadambara* presents debates between the dominant schools of his time. In the first part, the debate is between a Vedic scholar and a Buddhist; and in the third, between a follower of Carvaka and a master of Nyāya and Vaisesika, with the audience joining in and cheering their favoured speakers. Bhatta was a playwright, a philosopher of the Nyāya school, and one of the first to write a philosophical play in Sanskrit.
 20. Patanjali's *Mahābhāṣya* (150 BCE) states the views of Panini and Katyayana, raises questions, puts forward several alternate answers, critically evaluates them, and gives his own view. Yaska wrote his famous commentary *Nirukta* on the *Nighantu* in the seventh BCE. He presents problems in the form of controversies between different schools, states their views, and offers his own.
 21. As Bimal Matilal argues, debate was closely tied up with the pursuit of truth in India, both a way of arriving at and an ideal medium of articulating it. See his *The Character of Logic in India* (Albany: Suny, 1998).
 22. S.A.A. Rizvi, *Religion and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975), pp. 411 and 413.
 23. Heinrich von Stietencron, *Hindu Myth, Hindu History: Religion, Art and Politics* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), Ch. 7.
 24. Father Antony Monserrate, *Commentary on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*, trans. J.S. Holyland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922).
 25. Similar public debates between the Buddhists and Christian missionaries, the first in Baddegama in 1860, took place in Sri Lanka where the public participation was sometimes more vocal and exuberant.
 26. See Dayananda Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, trans. G.P. Upadhyaya (New Delhi: Vijaykumar Govindram Hasanand, 2008), Ch. XIII, for a fuller statement of some of these criticisms. He says that his book is in the nature of *vāda* and its aim is to 'discover truth'.
 27. John Muir, principal of Banaras Sanskrit College, wrote a book in Sanskrit with the title *Matapariksā: A Sketch of the Argument for Christianity and against Hinduism*. Nahemiah Goreh wrote a robust rejoinder in Sanskrit in his *Sastratattavavinirmaya*. There was also a face-to-face encounter between the two. See the essay by Avril Powell in Geoffrey A. Oddie (ed.),

- Religious Conversion Movements in South Asia* (London: Curzon Press, 1997).
28. Bruce Robertson, *Raja Ram Mohan Roy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 32–3.
 29. J.T.F. Jordens, *Dayanand Saraswati: His Life and Ideas* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 148.
 30. Har Bilas Sarda, *Life of Dayananda Saraswati* (Ajmer: Vedic Yantralaya, 1946), p. 69.
 31. For good discussions, see Gurpreet Mahajan, *India: Political Ideas and the Making of a Democratic Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 2013) and Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1986). See also Bhikhu Parekh, 'The Poverty of Indian Political Theory', *History of Political Thought*, vol. XIII, no. 3, Autumn 1992, where I examine this and related issues at length.
 32. Mahatma Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1958), vol. 41, pp. 105–6 and vol. 43, pp. 466–7.
 33. For an excellent discussion, see Gopal Guru, 'The Idea of India: Derivative, Desi and Beyond', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XLVL, no. 39, 2011.
 34. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* grew out of a debate he had in London and was written in the form of a dialogue. He also started a new kind of debate in India. He wrote regularly in his weekly journals, to which his readers responded and he, in turn, to them. Sometimes, the exchanges went on for several issues and involved such questions as whether it was non-violent to kill a terminally ill cow, the importance of spinning, whether it was right to drive away monkeys, and the value of celibacy. Gandhi initiated a national conversation between himself and his countrymen as well as among them that had no parallel in India or even elsewhere. He also carried it on through the thousands of letters he received and answered every week, and their impact on their recipients was considerable.
 35. For a most helpful discussion, see Austin Granville, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 310–11. For Austin, the Constituent Assembly was guided by the 'two wholly Indian concepts, consensus and accommodation'.
 36. *Constituent Assembly Debates* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1985), vol. II, p. 299.
 37. *Gitā*, Ch. VI, verses 32, 36, and 47.

Chapter 2

1. Michael Walzer, 'On the Role of Symbolism in Political Thought', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 82, no. 2, 1967, p. 194.

2. Ambedkar said at the third reading of the Constitution on 25 November 1949 that the Constituent Assembly would 'have been nothing but chaos' without the 'sense of order and discipline' introduced by the Congress party. He went on, 'It is because of the discipline of the Congress Party that the Drafting Committee was able to pilot the Constitution in the Assembly with sure knowledge as to the fate of each article and each amendment'. The discipline, however, did not always work. 'Fortunately there were rebels', though Ambedkar thought they were ideologically motivated and often unconvincing. *Constituent Assembly Debates* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1985), vol. xi, p. 973. This work is hereafter cited as CAD.
3. Constituent Assembly debate on 18 September 1949.
4. 'Aryavarta' was another popular name, but it had few supporters. It was unacceptable to south Indians, and the term 'Arya' had acquired a bad name because of the Nazi use of it. Arabs called India al-Hind, and the so-called Arabic numerals Hindsa. The widespread belief that the words 'India' and 'Hindu' are derived from 'Sindhu', meaning great river or sea in Sanskrit, is questioned by some scholars. Hindus did not call themselves 'Sindhus', and there was no reason why others should. Persian contact with India precedes the birth of Sanskrit language, and hence its name for India cannot be a derivative of a Sanskrit word such as Sindhu. In Farsi, 'hind' means black, and that might suggest an altogether different line of inquiry! On a different note, it is worth observing that the terms 'Arya' and 'Iran' mean 'noble' in Avestan, which is close to Sanskrit, and that the word 'Arya' appears in the Zoroastrian scripture *Avesta*.
5. Several provinces were also keen to change their names, and the relevant Bill was brought before the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949. Loknath Misra proposed that steps should be taken 'to change the names of all the provinces to fit in with our name Bharatvarsha'. He thought there were 'various cogent grounds' for calling Orissa 'Utkal', such as that Tagore and the Congress had called it by that name, that its university was so called, and that it was 'an ennobling word'. United Provinces Government and Assembly decided to change its name to 'Aryavarta', but that was rejected by an overwhelming majority of the Constituent Assembly on the ground that the term referred to the whole of India and should not be monopolized by any province. In 1938 the UP delegates had proposed to the All India Congress Committee (AICC) that its name should be changed to 'Hindustan'. When it was rejected, they brought it to its open session, where it met a similar fate. CAD, vol. XI, p. 923.
6. For many, 'India' referred to a territorial unit and had no cultural content. By contrast, 'Bharat' referred to a particular way of conceptualizing its history and character. The two represented different images of the country.

7. This was reported in the *Statesman* of Calcutta on 16 November 1949. From time to time, some discussion of what India should be called also took place at Congress sessions.
8. The editorial of the *Hindustan Times* on 26 January 1950 observed: 'Today India recovers her soul after centuries of serfdom and resumes her ancient name.' It is worth noting that the militant advocates of Hindi submitted 29 amendments to the draft Constitution between February and November 1948. The first one that wanted Hindi to be the national language of India called Hindi 'Bharati'.
9. See Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *Mountbatten and the Partition of India* (Singapore: Trans-East, 1982), pp. 60 and 70.
10. *Padma Purānā* (II, 6.1, 6.6) calls Bharat *punyabhumi* because it has holy places and conduces to a holy life. *Vishnu Purānā* (II, 3.2, 11, 3.5) calls it *karmabhumi* because it is a land where religious rituals are performed, which ensures a passage to heaven.

Vedic testimony favours the view that the Bharatas were a most warlike and brave Aryan tribe which drove the earlier waves of Aryans eastward or southward. They defeated the Arya leader Paurava and celebrated their victory by performing a yajna. They were later defeated but regained their superiority under king Divodasa and ruled over the tract between Sutlej and Yamuna. They were much praised by Rig Veda (10.95, 18; 3.33; 7, 83.1, 7.25.5) and *Satapatha Brāhmana*. Kings in later times added the title of Bharata to enhance their military prestige, and also because the Bharata warriors were believed to be pious; for example, the Kurus whose territory came to be known as Bharata. The name 'Bharata' became popular and was applied to both the country as a whole and its people.

The Purānās popularized a different and dubious story according to which Bharat, the brave son of Dushyant and Shakuntala, brought other tribes and *mlecchas* under his control and became a *chakravartin*. His descendants included the Kurus and the Pandavas, whose war forms the theme of Mahābhārata. Kalidas gave this story considerable popularity.

11. The Sikhs generally followed the Muslim practice. Guru Tegh Bahadur Singh saw himself as a protector of the Hindus and was referred to as Hind ki chādar in recognition of what he did for them.
12. *CAD*, vol. XI, p. 878.
13. For the highly influential writer Bharatendu Harishchandra, 'Bhāratvarsha' (which he used in preference to 'Bharat'), Hindustan, and India referred to the same territorial unit but highlighted different aspects of it. 'Bhāratvarsha' stressed its cultural and religious unity derived from its Hindu heritage and history, especially the Vaishnava Bhakti tradition. It did not exclude Muslims and other minorities but saw them as part of, and

expected them to integrate into, a Hindu vision of India. For a valuable discussion, see Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010).

14. That the term 'Bharat' referred to what was indigenous to India was evident even in Ambedkar when he wrote to Gandhi in a letter that he had converted to Buddhism rather than to Islam or Christianity because the former was part of 'Bharatiya culture' and kept him within the 'national' fold.
15. It is interesting that the Congress was called the 'Indian' National Congress and retained that name after Independence. The Hindutva-based Bharatiya Janata Party preferred the term 'Bharat'.
16. It is interesting that such highly popular films as *Mother India* and *Chak de India* had 'India', not 'Bharat', in their titles. It is perhaps part of the larger phenomenon of using 'India' to refer to the rich urban and 'Bharat' to the poor rural India. By a curious but predictable logic, which would have surprised some Constituent Assembly members, 'India' has required progressive and 'Bharat' backward associations.
17. Pre-Independence India had many flags; for example, the Communist (red), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (saffron), and the Muslim League (green, with a crescent and a star, which Jinnah called the 'national' flag of Muslim India).
18. P. Thankappan Nair, *Indian National Songs and Symbols* (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd., 1987). For an excellent discussion, see Arundhati Virmani, *A National Flag for India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008).
19. In the Constituent Assembly, Seth Govind Das wanted to give the flag a distinct name, similar to Britain's Union Jack, and suggested 'Sudarshan'.
20. Virmani, *A National Flag for India*, pp. 112–13.
21. Virmani, *A National Flag for India*, pp. 135–6. Gandhi thought that since the desired communal harmony had not been achieved, the flag should continue to have three colours.
22. CAD, vol. IV, pp. 740–5.
23. CAD, vol. IV, pp. 740–5 and 765–6.
24. Different individuals and groups interpreted the three colours differently. The AICC said in 1931 that saffron represented courage and sacrifice; white, peace and truth; and green, faith and chivalry. For Radhakrishnan, saffron stood for renunciation and disinterestedness; white, for light or path of truth; and green, for 'our relation to the soil and plant life on which all other life depends'.

Many Indian leaders and writers had criticized the communal references of colours as 'pernicious and anti-national'. The flag 'should make one think

- of India, and of oneself as an Indian', rather than a particular community. See a representative article by S.K. Chatterjee, *Modern Review*, June 1931.
25. Nehru said he was happy that the flag was 'indirectly' associated with the name of Aśoka. 'It is well that at this moment of strife, conflict and intolerance, our minds should go back towards what India stood for in the ancient days and what it has stood for, I hope and believe, essentially throughout the ages in spite of mistakes and errors and degradations from time to time.' Aśoka's rule was marked by tolerance and internationalism, and Nehru wanted Indians to be constantly reminded of it. *Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. 4, pp. 765–6. Nehru was not alone in favouring Aśoka's chakra. A committee set up before India's Independence and chaired by Rajendra Prasad had recommended that the Congress flag should become the national flag after replacing the spinning wheel with Aśoka's chakra.
 26. Kalelkar suggested in an important article that the wheel could be simplified and symbolize not only the charkha but also the Buddhist dharmachakra. Gandhi commended this 'thoughtful suggestion' in an article of that title in *Harijan*, 6 July 1947. See also Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 88, pp. 400, 416, and 438–40. Mountbatten suggested a small union jack in the upper corner of the flag to symbolize continuity with the British rule. Gandhi was sympathetic to the idea, saying it was an act of courtesy and showed goodwill for the old adversary, but the Congress Working Committee rejected it.
 27. Although 'VM' refers to thirty crore Indians, this figure crept in at a later stage when the song acquired national significance. In its original version, it was seven crore, encompassing the then province of Bengal which included Bihar and including the entire population without any religious distinction.
 28. Seth Govind Das said in the Constituent Assembly that 'VM' could be set to orchestral music by changing the way in which it was sung, as was done with the songs of Soordas and Mirabai. 'VM' was set to martial music in the film *Anand Math* released in the early 1950s. It was sung by Lata Mangeshkar with a chorus, and the chant had a marching tone.
 29. 'JG' was first published under the title 'Bharat Vidhata' and the subtitle 'Brahmosangit' in *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, an official organ of the Adi Brahmo Samaj edited by Tagore himself. It was later incorporated in *Dharmasangit*, a collection of his religious hymns. A few months after its composition, it was used as a devotional song at a religious ceremony marking an annual spring festival of the Brahmos.
 30. *CAD*, vol. XI, p. 981 and vol. IV, p. 313.
 31. *Harijan*, 19 May 1946.
 32. I am told that in some schools in Saurashtra that are run by the Dakshinamurty Society, 'Sindh' is replaced by 'Andhra'.

33. Tagore composed the song at the request of his friend Asutosh Chaudhuri, a judge of the Calcutta High Court. It was to be sung during the 26th Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress on 27 December 1911. The first day's proceedings opened with 'VM' and the second day began with 'JG'. After it was sung, a resolution was passed welcoming the royal couple, followed by a Hindi song specially composed to welcome them. While papers such as the *Amrit Bazar Patrika* and the *Bengalee* separated the two events, the Anglo-Indian press including the *Englishman* and the *Statesmen* confused the two and created the impression that 'JG' was a welcome song. If W.B. Yeats is to be believed, Tagore himself had feared such a misunderstanding but evidently did nothing to correct it. As he is supposed to have told one of his assistants, 'Here is a poem which I have written. It is addressed to God, but give it to the Congress people. It will please them. They will think it is addressed to the king.' Yeats in a letter to Lady Gregory. Warwick Gould, John Kelly, and Deirdre Toomey (eds), *Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), vol. II, p. 251.
34. In a letter to the journal *Vichitra* on 20 November 1937, Tagore said that when he was asked by a friend to compose a song in praise of the king, his 'request had amazed me and the amazement was mingled with anger'. He went on to say that his reference in the song to the 'Great Charioteer of Man's destiny in age after age' could not by any means be 'George the Fifth or George the Sixth or any other George'. Tagore returned to the subject in a letter to the journal *Purvasa* on 29 March 1939. He said: 'I should only insult myself if I cared to answer those who consider me capable of such unbounded stupidity as to sing in praise of George the Fourth or George the Fifth as the eternal charioteer...' Cited in Prabodhchandra Sen, *India's National Anthem* (Shantiniketan: Vishva Bharati, 1972), p. 2.
35. Some members of the Constituent Assembly feared that the government might take decisions on these matters without regard to their views or public opinion. Seth Govind Das expressed this fear on 24 November 1948 when he said that unless the 'important cultural issues' such as the name of the country, national anthem, and national language are decided 'according to the wishes of the people of the country, swarajya will have no meaning to the common people of our country'. *CAD*, vol. VII, pp. 223 and 982.
36. *CAD*, vol. XI, pp. 520-1, see also vol. IV, pp. 740-1.
37. The survey was conducted by the *Free Press Bulletin* and was limited to Bombay. On historical associations, 'VM' was approved by 48.9 per cent; and 'JG', by 35 per cent of those polled. On tune appeal, 'JG' was approved by 51 per cent; and 'VM' by 27.2 per cent. 'Saare Jahan' was also quite popular among a fifth of the interviewees.

38. Although some of Nehru's remarks might give such an impression, it would be wrong, even offensive, and unfair to Tagore to suggest that 'JG' was selected only or mainly because of its tune and orchestral adaptability. It has to be judged as a whole and not on the basis of its first two stanzas alone, and even the latter offer a profoundly rich way of imagining India. The song as a whole, which only a few Indians care to read, is remarkably free from narrow nationalism, refers to 'the East and the West', talks of bringing the hearts of all people into the 'harmony of one life', and stresses human solidarity. It alerts the country to its conformist and oppressive tendencies and hopes for and detects a fresh 'breath of life'. Tagore rightly called it in his English translation the 'Morning Song of India'. Its first two stanzas, as well as some others, describe both the diversity and the unity of India. The diversity is geographical and ethnic, and it is held together by common hopes and aspirations.

'JG' embodies Tagore's idea of the unity of India's body and spirit, physical and spiritual self. As he put it in 1927, 'We are nowadays profuse in the use of the term *National Consciousness* but what kind of national consciousness can there be if devoid of actual geographical and ethnological realisation?' (Cited in Prabodhachandra Sen, *India's National Anthem*, p. 14).

For Tagore the spirit, the identity, the idea of India cannot be formed independently of its geography because rivers and hills provide the basis for an 'image of her own physical self'. This is why he suggested in the same letter that a 'song should be written in which all the provinces, rivers and hills of India are strung together in order to impose upon the minds of our people an idea of the geography of our country'. Such a song would have been extremely unwieldy and could not have served as the national anthem. The two stanzas gesture towards it and are sufficiently evocative of what Tagore called India's 'physical self'.

39. CAD, vol. XI, p. 982.
40. The cabinet made the 'provisional' decision. It was sung at the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1947, in Indian embassies abroad, and also in India.
41. Tagore was convinced that 'VM' could not be the national anthem. As he wrote to Subhas Chandra Bose on 19 October 1937, 'The core of "Bande Mataram" is a hymn to the Goddess Durga; this is so plain that there can be no doubt about it.... The novel *Ānandamath* is a work of literature, and so the song is appropriate in it. But Parliament is a place of union for all religious groups, and there the song cannot be appropriate. When Bengali Mussulmans show signs of stubborn fanaticism, we regard these as intolerable. If we too copy them and make unreasonable demands, it will be self-defeating.' Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds), *Selected*

Letters of Rabindranath Tagore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 487. Tagore's remarks on 'VM' are a little harsh, but it would be wrong to think that they were motivated by a desire to promote his 'JG' at the expense of the better-known 'VM'.

42. Nehru initially thought there was no problem with 'VM'. He changed his mind after reading its English translation. See his *Selected Works*, vol. VIII (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984), Second Series, pp. 186–7. Subhas Chandra Bose too had his doubts and wrote to Tagore for his advice. The Tagore quotation in the previous note was his reply. Bose adopted 'JG' as the anthem for his Indian National Army and wanted it to be the national anthem of independent India.
43. On 14 August 1947, the Constituent Assembly sang the first few lines of 'Saare Jahan' and the first verse of 'JG', led by Sucheta Kriplani. On the 50th anniversary of Indian Independence 'VM', 'JG', and 'Saare Jahan' were all sung in the Central Hall of the Parliament. In the same year, A.R. Rahman made the Hindi version of 'VM' as 'Ma Tujhe Salam' and set it to music.
44. See the letter by the Cabinet Secretary to the Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, dated 24 December 1947 in the National Archives of India. After Independence, the king's portrait on the notes and coins had to be removed, and the decision was taken to adopt the crest of the Aśoka pillar. It was 'only incidental' that the same crest was later approved as the emblem of the state (A statement by the Ministry of Finance in 1963, quoted in C. Sivaramamurti, *Our National Emblem* [New Delhi: Publication Division, Government of India, n.d.], p. 9.)
45. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3: 1 :6.
46. The motto created a controversy. Some argued that grammatically it should be 'jayati' not 'jayate' and wrote to Nehru and other ministers to that effect. 'Jayate' was *apāniniyan* or against Panini's injunctions according to which the root 'ji', which is *parasmaipada*, takes 'te' only when preceded by 'vi' or 'para'.

The government replied that one should be faithful to the original text from which the sentence was taken, that it was the correct Upanishadic form, and that only the rules of grammar prevailing at the time should be considered. See the notification by the Under Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of States, dated 26 July 1949 in the National Archives of India. Some prominent individuals and organizations wrote to the government suggesting alternative mottos such as *satyam vada* and *dharmam chara*.

47. Nehru talked of the 'Order of the Lotus' in his note to the Cabinet Secretary on 31 January 1954. I thank Dr Nirmal Sarna for the information on the symbolism of the lotus in Indian thought.

48. V. Choudhury (ed.), *Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents*, vol. 17 (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1997), pp. 68–9.
49. In the Constituent Assembly debate on 24 November 1949, L. Krishnaswami Bharathi quoted a Sanskrit professor of Benares as saying, 'Whenever a Hindi author takes pen in hand, he ceases to be sober and is Sanskrit-drunk.' Despite Nehru's protest, and that of many others, this tendency continues unabated. The Constitution is more guarded in this respect. Article 351 says that while Hindi should draw on the forms, styles, and expressions of Hindustani, it should draw for its vocabulary 'primarily on Sanskrit' whenever this is 'necessary and desirable'. CAD, vol. XI, p. 904.
50. Such disagreements and the way they were resolved were also evident in the status of Hindi. Hindi was accepted as the official, though not the national, language of India. And even then English was to 'continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union for which it was being used' before the commencement of the Constitution. This included its use not only in interstate communication but also in the high courts and the Supreme Court and parliamentary Bills. This gave the 'official' language an extremely limited role in the legal and political life of India, and amounted to little in practice. Although this was meant to last for only 15 years, the **Parliament was free to extend it indefinitely.**
51. Since 'JG' has a reference to divinity, the Supreme Court ruled in Bijole Emmanuel's case that one may abstain from singing it on grounds of conscientious objection provided that one shows respect for it by standing up **and keeping still.**
52. Many Indian leaders shared common cultural memories and understandably gave expression to them, especially on such a deeply emotional occasion as the country's independence. On the night of 14 August 1947, Nehru and his colleagues sat cross legged around a sacrificial fire in Delhi while Hindu priests chanted hymns and sprinkled holy water over them. This is no different from offering prayer in a church on important national occasions, a common practice in the West. To criticize such practices in the name of secularism is to carry it to an absurd and unrealistic extreme, the **surest way to undermine its legitimacy and appeal.**
53. Buddhism had gained considerable popularity in India from the early decades of the twentieth century onwards and was very much in the air. Theosophists wrote about it, as did historians, philosophers, and literary critics such as R.G. Bhandarkar, Hazariprasad Dwivedi, Harprasad Shastri, and Dharmanand Kosambi. Artists and historians of art such as Ananda Coomarswamy and Nandalal Bose wrote about Buddhist art and architecture. Several political leaders such as Acharya Narendra Dev, Acharya Kriplani, and Dr Lohia took great interest in Buddhism and highlighted

its contribution and contemporary relevance. For many educated Indians, Buddhism—its art, culture, philosophy, religion, and ethics—represented the greatest achievement of their civilization. Hindu in its inspiration and some of its doctrines but free from the castes, polytheism, ritualism, and so on, it was a heritage they could embrace with pride without altogether losing their Hindu roots.

Chapter 3

1. Although Tagore's view that Gandhi was the prophet of tapasyā and he the poet of ānanda captures some of their differences, it is ultimately unsatisfactory. For Gandhi, tapasyā was a source of ānanda. It was intended to attain identification with all living beings and finding joy in transcending selfhood. As he said, 'pain voluntarily borne is the source of ānanda', and he often described his fasts as both tapasyā and sources of great peace and joy. (Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986], vol. II, p. 133. Gandhi often said that his fasts, though painful, gave him great joy and peace.) As for Tagore, ānanda could not be obtained without tapasyā. The pursuit of beauty, for him a supreme source of ānanda, involved openness to the world, intense discipline, dedication, transcendence of selfhood, and hence tapasyā.
2. Tagore had a high view of his global mission. In April 1918, he planned to go to the US even when his daughter lay dying. He did so because 'the fires of destruction are burning throughout the world. History is to be made anew—at the moment. I too have some deeds to do. I can no longer remain here in my little corner.' See K. Dutta and A. Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 198. On another occasion, he said: 'I know there is a call for me to work towards the true union of East and West. I have been unconsciously getting ready for this mission. When I wrote my *Sadhana* lectures, I was not aware that I had been fulfilling my destiny.' (Uma Das Gupta (ed.), *Tagore: Selected Writings on Education and Nationalism* [New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009], p. 207.)
3. Just before his fast against the Macdonald Award, Gandhi wrote to Tagore: 'You have been to me a true friend because you have been a candid friend often speaking your thoughts aloud.' (Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds), *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], p. 415.)
4. Tagore said in an article in *Prabashi* in September 1933, 'Even today I am carrying the title of "Gurudev" which Brahmabandhab bestowed upon me.'

5. Tagore was fascinated by Gandhi. In his various articles on him, he explored the sources of Gandhi's great energy and impact as well as the best way to make sense of him. In his 'Gandhi the Man' which is largely about Gandhi as a national leader, Tagore concludes that the 'only true perspective' on him was to see him as 'an artist' to be judged not by his 'theories and fantasies of his creed' or 'fads' but rather by how he expresses his unique humanity in his life and action. Tagore goes on to argue that while Gandhi's theories are one-sided and harsh, his life overcomes their limitations. Thus he abhors sex but is extremely tender towards and completely at ease with women. (R.K. Prabhu and Ravindra Kelekar (eds), *Truth Called Them Differently* [Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1961], pp. 131–6.)
6. In 'Gandhi the Man', written three years before his death and the only article in which he refers to him as simply Gandhi, Tagore provides a short but most penetrating perspective on and corrects his earlier accounts of Gandhi. (Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, pp. 131–6). He not only highlights Gandhi's limitations but also their complex origins in his strengths and shows with great generosity how he transcends both.

It is wrongly believed that Tagore conferred the title 'Mahatma' on Gandhi. He used it frequently to refer to him but was not the first to do so. It is also striking that Gandhi himself used it to describe Socrates and even Homer in his Gujarati translation of Plato's *Apology*.

7. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, pp. 134 and 135. When Gertrude Sen approached Tagore in November 1937 for a piece on 'Gandhi, the man' and not just Gandhi the saint or politician for publication in the journal *Asia*, Tagore declined. He said he was in bad health and wondered if he could at any time have done justice to the subject had he even attempted it. Furthermore, 'though I hold Gandhiji dear and cannot but feel the force of his personality, I can hardly be said to know him intimately. We have never lived together and worked together for any length of time. What understanding and appreciation we have of each other is more or less intuitive.' (Dutta and Robinson, *Selected Letters*, p. 489.) Two months later, Tagore wrote precisely the kind of piece Sen had solicited in the *Sunday Statesman* of Calcutta. It was published eight months later in *Asia*.
8. On one of his visits to Santiniketan, Gandhi signed a young woman's autograph book and wrote: 'Never make a promise in haste. Having once made it, fulfil it at the cost of your life.' When Tagore saw it, he became agitated. He wrote in the same book a short Bengali poem and, perhaps so that Gandhi could see it, concluded in English with a remark, 'Fling away your promise if it is found to be wrong.' (Cited in Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian* [London: Allen Lane, 2005], p. 99.) If it is accurately

reported, which I doubt, the incident suggests Tagore's sense of insecurity and even perhaps rivalry in relation to Gandhi. There was no reason for him to read Gandhi's entry or to react to it immediately. Even if he was right to feel strongly about such a trivial matter, he could have talked to the woman afterwards or made his point in a less aggressive manner. He could also have been more understanding of Gandhi's remark, which makes an important point though in an exaggerated manner and only applies to promises not made in haste. After all, he should have known that Gandhi would not want a promise to be kept if it involved a murder.

9. After one of his prayer meetings at Sabarmati Ashram in 1925, Gandhi remarked in the course of his brief address; 'Rabindranath is spoiling some rich men's children. He is teaching them dance, music and play acting. What has he done for the country?' These remarks were reported in *Bombay Chronicle*. Although he was deeply uneasy about their becoming public, Gandhi did not deny them. (See Nittopriyo Ghose, 'Gandhiji on Tagore', *Frontier*, vol. 43, nos 12–15, 2010.) This is an English translation of the Bengali article written by Radharaman Mitra, who was present at Gandhi's prayer meeting, in *Nillohit*, Special Tagore Issue, June 2010.
10. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p.108.
11. For Tagore, the Christian God is the God of the whole humanity, whereas for him God is also uniquely bound to each individual, 'working out, through our evolution in time, our ultimate destiny'. Tagore calls him *jiban debata*, a 'limited aspect of divinity which has its unique place in the individual life in contrast to that which belongs to the universe'. (Dutta and Robinson, *Selected Letters*, p. 349). Gandhi did not explicitly subscribe to such a personalized or individualized view of God, though his idea of 'inner voice' could be interpreted along these lines.
12. 'I have often felt that if we were not Hindus (in the wider sense of Hinduism which includes Buddhism as well), I should like my people to be Christians.' (Dutta and Robinson, *Selected Letters*, p. 488.) Although both Tagore and Gandhi admired Christianity, especially its emphasis on universal love, non-violence, concern for the poor, and spirit of social service, Gandhi was particularly drawn to its doctrine of suffering, which he thought to be its central and unique feature. God became man and suffered as one to save humanity; Christian martyrs bore witness to God and won over their enemies by their suffering; and it was the power of Christian suffering that lay behind the spread of their religion. While acknowledging the importance of non-violent suffering in the pursuit of justice, Tagore did not give it the kind of ontological and moral importance that Gandhi did.
13. Maitraye Devi, *Tagore by Fireside* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2002), pp. 225–6 and 241–2.

14. Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)* (London: Macmillan, 1920).
15. 'Beauty is the signature which the Creator stamps upon His works when He is satisfied with them.' The 'very fact that they [the industries] are ugly shows that they are in discordance with the whole creation.' For Tagore, beauty is the 'twin brother' of truth. Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1917), p. 97.
16. Tagore, *Nationalism*, pp. 67–8.
17. Tagore, *Nationalism*, p. 67.
18. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p. 138.
19. Tagore, *Nationalism*, pp. 69–70.
20. Society 'is the expression of those moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature'. Elsewhere, Tagore takes the slightly different view that society is a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. Tagore, *Nationalism*, p. 15 and 92.
21. Tagore, *Nationalism*, p. 69.
22. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, pp. 24–5 and 114–15.
23. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, pp. 115–16.
24. Tagore wanted India to develop a strong sense of social unity or community. Deeply divided as it was along caste, religious, and other lines, it would not otherwise be able to develop the spirit of mutual concern and collective solidarity and sustain its independence. Tagore seemed to look to a shared culture to provide social unity, and that is fairly close to the sense of nationhood stressed by Gandhi and many others.
25. *Young India*, 19 June, 1924; see also Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings*, vol. 1, p. 533.
26. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, pp. 118–19.
27. K. Dutta and A. Robinson, *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 322.
28. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p. 33.
29. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, pp. 74 and 75.
30. *Young India*, 11 August, 1921.
31. *Young India*, 1 September, 1921.
32. Referring to the burning of foreign cloth, Monsieur Richard, a Frenchman, wrote to a friend in India: 'I know you are distressed at the burning of foreign cloth as directed by Mr. Gandhi. But consider that by these bonfires material goods are being transformed into dynamic moral forces for the nation's awakening. Let the spiritual body of the nation be fed by this sacrificial holocaust.... When Lazarus resuscitates, when the nation rises from the dead, his shroud has to be burned.' (Quoted in Yogesh Chadha, *Rediscovering Gandhi* [London: Century, 1997], p. 254.)

33. Tagore welcomed much of this and was not a rootless cosmopolitan. Loyalty to and pride in one's country was a virtue provided that it was critical and took account of others' interests. Nikhil in *Ghare Baire* is 'willing to serve' his country though not to 'worship it as a god'. For Tagore, love of one's country or rather people had a valued place in moral life as long as it was not the 'final' or 'highest' value and allowed to 'triumph over humanity'.
34. Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1960), p. 152.
35. The debate on non-cooperation and the issues surrounding it became so vehement that C.F. Andrews feared a permanent rift between Tagore and Gandhi, and arranged their meeting at Tagore's residence on 6 September 1921. According to Andrews, the only other person present at the meeting, the two found it 'extremely difficult to arrive at a common intellectual understanding'. (Dutta and Robinson, *Selected Letters*, pp. 322, 258, and 306) However, they understood their differences better and, more importantly, built the basis of friendship.
36. Dutta and Robinson, *Selected Letters*, p. 322. Tagore wrote to Romain Rolland, 'I can no longer hide from myself that we [he and Gandhi] are radically different in our apprehension and pursuit of truth.'
37. Tagore undertook no less than seven extensive lecture tours to over 20 countries between 1920 and 1930, whereas Gandhi left the country only once after arriving from South Africa in 1914, and that too to attend the crucial Second Round Table Conference. He did have a message for the world but thought that it could have no appeal unless India lived up to it and proved its value by example. In what appears to be a mild rebuke to Tagore, he remarked 'My modesty has prevented me from declaring from the housetop that the message of Non-cooperation, Non-violence and Swadeshi is a message to the world. It must fall flat if it does not bear fruit in the soil where it has been delivered.... Before, therefore, I can think of sharing with the world, I must possess.' That meant staying at home and slowly and painfully building the country. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p. 80.

A fuller explanation of this striking difference between the two would also need to include other factors. Gandhi was a political leader and could not afford to be out of India for long. His lifestyle too made travel difficult. Tagore felt underappreciated in India and sought reassurance abroad, which was not the case with Gandhi. Gandhi dominated India's cultural and political landscape, and Tagore, who disagreed with him on important issues, sought to find a space for himself outside India and, through that, within India itself. As he once said, 'Indians have protested against and even censured Gandhi, but they have never insulted him in a low and vile way.'

Some of them would have loved to but 'lacked the courage because they knew that the public would not stand for it'. By contrast 'many people are pleased when I am censured and most of the rest are completely indifferent. My countrymen are not hurt when I am publicly insulted, and therefore those engaged in slandering me have no fear of suffering any rebuke or loss.' Dutta and Robinson, *Selected Letters*, p. 369.

Tagore had a strong sense of his global destiny, and that too encouraged a *missionary* zeal. By contrast, Gandhi had a strong sense of being India's saviour and hence a powerful *messianic* attitude. Since he thought that he alone could liberate his people from their current servile and degenerate state, he took personal responsibility for their behaviour and punished and 'purified' himself through his fasts.

38. The controversy over the importance of spinning showed anger and sharpness not to be found in their other exchanges, not even in that over Gandhi's remarks on Ram Mohun Roy. Tagore called his article 'The Cult of the Charkha', spoke of being 'afraid' to express his views because of the 'abuse' and 'swearing' to which he was being subjected, mocked the place given to the 'charkha goddess' in the 'shrine of swaraj', and linked its acceptance to the Indian habit of uncritical thinking. Tagore's praise of Gandhi in the article did not hide his anger.

Since the charkha meant so much to Gandhi, Tagore's attack on it hurt him greatly. Many of his close associates were also disturbed and urged him to reply. Gandhi's reply two months later betrayed uncharacteristic anger. He called Tagore 'Sir Rabindranath', which he later regretted in a letter to Tagore's secretary, said that 'dame rumour' had reached him that 'jealousy is the root of all that criticism', and rebuked Tagore for not bothering to read him properly and relying instead on inaccurate 'table talk'. More generally, he tried to weaken the force of Tagore's criticism by arguing that he was basically a 'poet' who, like others of his kind, was given to exaggeration and naivety and not to be taken 'literally' or too seriously.

Although Tagore surrendered his Knighthood, the Viceroy wrote back that he could not officially do so. As Tagore told Edward Thompson, 'I still have it. I have eaten my pudding and must keep it.' (See Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, p. 217.)

39. In private, Tagore was even more scathing about the charkha and thought that 'only a rustic country like ours devoid of serious endeavour' could fall for a 'magical' formula that 'involves nothing more strenuous than sitting in a corner of some room in a shady village'. (Dutta and Robinson, *Selected Letters*, p. 365.)
40. It is striking that Tagore generally sent an advance message to Gandhi before publishing a critical piece on him, partly as a matter of courtesy, partly to

- avoid garbled reports reaching Gandhi, and partly to soften the impact of his criticism. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p. 106.
41. If we were to extend the general point of his revised assessment of Gandhi in 'Gandhi the Man', it is likely that he would have seen the charkha in a more sympathetic light.
 42. For Gandhi spinning was *sutra-yagna*, the 'applied translation of the Gita, if one may coin that expression'.
 43. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, pp. 116–17.
 44. At the time of the Quetta earthquake in May 1935, Gandhi said, 'I must repeat what I said at the time of the Bihar disaster. There is divine purpose behind every physical calamity.' Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 63, p. 137.
 45. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 7, pp. 455–7 and vol. 6, p. 443.
 46. For Gandhi's discussion with Kakasaheb Kalelkar, see the latter's foreword to Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p. XIV. Kalelkar says that in some of his verses, Tagore himself talks of human iniquity having physical consequences.
 47. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p. XIV.
 48. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, pp. 118–19.
 49. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p. 121.
 50. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p. 29.
 51. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, pp. 28–9.
 52. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p. 28.
 53. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, p. 24.
 54. Gandhi's view was shared by many including Bankim Chatterjee. For the latter, Chaitanya, unlike Ram Mohun Roy, spoke in vernacular, reached out to the masses, won their respect, and succeeded in influencing them. This is how 'our Renaissance' happened. In sharp contrast, despite the efforts of 'three and a half generations' since Roy started 'peddling' Brahmoism, it never caught on. See Partha Chatterjee, in Thomas Patham and Kenneth Deutsch (eds), *Political Thought in Modern India* (Delhi: SAGE, 1987), p. 89. Ranade took the same view when he said that Brahmo Samaj had failed to 'stir the heart of the nation' because its influence was 'only operative over a few souls brought up in a particular atmosphere'. See D.S. Sharma, *Hinduism Through the Ages*, (Bombay: Bhavan, 1989), p. 897.
 55. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1989), vol. III, pp. 214–15, 219 and vol. IV, pp. 371–2.
 56. Prabhu and Kelekar, *Truth Called Them Differently*, pp. 36–7.
 57. Uma Das Gupta, *Tagore: Selected Writings on Education and Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 299.
 58. See Sankar Ghosh, *Mahatma Gandhi* (Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1991), p.163. Like their differences, their commonalities extended to large

subjects such as their views of Indian civilization and colonial rule as well as to personal habits. Both valued and took great interest in rural development and education. Both enjoyed public life but also found it tiring and withdrew from it from time to time. Both were artists in their own different ways and well understood the power of symbols. Contrary to the general impression, Gandhi was for years greatly interested in literature, and once said that not being able to pursue his literary tastes was the price he most regretted paying for his political activities. Both attracted and were in turn attracted to beautiful women, and evidently resisted the inevitable temptation.

59. Nehru adored and was in turn highly admired by both Gandhi and Tagore, and though attached to Gandhi, he sent his daughter to Santiniketan. The reverse intellectual traffic from Tagore to Gandhi was just as common.

Chapter 4

1. Vasant Moon (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Bombay, Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra, 1979-96).
2. B.R. Ambedkar, *Buddha and His Dhamma* (Bombay: Siddhartha College, 1957).
3. Ambedkar rejected several Buddhist ideas such as rebirth, life as *dukkha*, and *sangha* as an organization apart from society, and reinterpreted some others in socio-political terms. Like the Buddha, he placed suffering at the centre of his thought but defined it in social and historical terms. It was the result of conflict between classes, consisted in exploitation and could only be ended by restructuring the world on the basis of liberty, equality, and fraternity; *nibbana* implied not dissolution of the self but happiness in this world. Ambedkar's Buddha is a secular socialist, and his Buddhism is neither Mahayana nor Hinayana but Navayana. *The Buddha and His Dhamma* was written in a hurry because of ill health and the fear of impending death. Ambedkar had said it would take at least a year but finished it in two months. It was written for the benefit of poorly educated untouchables, especially those disillusioned with Hinduism.
4. When Home Minister Katju said that Ambedkar had drafted the Constitution, the latter rejoined: 'Sir, my friends tell me that I made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody.' Cited in Dhananjay Keer, *Dr Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1990), p. 449. He was particularly scathing about Article 31 which gave the right to property and made it a fundamental right; it is 'a very ugly thing' and 'we do not take any responsibility for that'. See Bhagwan Das (ed.),

- Thus Spoke Ambedkar* (Bangalore: Ambedkar Sahitya Prakashan, 1979), vol. III, p. 172. The Constitution of the United States of India which Ambedkar proposed in his *States and Minorities* bears only a limited resemblance to the one he commended to the Constituent Assembly. In the former, the Parliament had no right to remove the executive by passing a no confidence motion, the prime minister was to be elected by the Parliament, a certain percentage of minority representatives were to be included in the cabinet and elected by their number in the Parliament, and so on. B.R. Ambedkar, *States and Minorities* (Lucknow: Buddha Vihar, 1978).
5. 'Till I went to England, I did not know he was a Harijan. I thought he was some Brahmin who took a deep interest in Harijans and therefore talked intemperately.' For a tense first meeting between the two, see Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, pp. 165–8. For Ambedkar's remark on Nehru, see Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 315.
 6. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 141.
 7. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 315.
 8. Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution* (New Delhi: SAGE, 1994), p. 325.
 9. Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. X, pp. 492–9.
 10. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 226.
 11. *Constituent Assembly Debates* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1985) vol. XI, p. 976. This work is hereafter cited as CAD.
 12. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 420.
 13. B.R. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables* (New Delhi: Amrit Book Company, 1948).
 14. 'Castes in India', *Indian Antiquary*, vol. XLI, May, 1917; 'Annihilation of Caste' in Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1, pp. 22–96. This essay was written as an address to a meeting of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal, a body created under the auspices of the Arya Samaj to reform Hindu society. When the organizers saw his draft, they postponed the meeting! Ambedkar published his address as a brochure.
 15. Valerian Roderigues (ed.), *The Essential Writings of Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 97–8.
 16. Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 2, p. 506.
 17. Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1, pp. 23–4 and vol. 3, p. 105.
 18. In the joint memorandum submitted to the Round Table Conference's Minorities Committee, Ambedkar said that the untouchables should be called 'non-caste Hindus', 'Protestant Hindus', or 'non-conformist Hindus'. See Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 189. In his evidence to the Simon Commission in 1928, he said, 'It does not matter whether I call myself a Hindu or a non-Hindu as long as I am outside the pale of Hinduism.'

19. B.R. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables*, pp. 146–7. See also his *Who were the Shudras? How they came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1946).
20. B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1945), p. 196. See Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9, pp. 192ff, 216–17.
21. B.R. Ambedkar, *Conditions Precedent for the Successful Working of Democracy* (Nagpur: Y.M. Panchbhair, 1976), p. 3. See also R.K. Kshirsagar, *Political Thought of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1991), p. 61. For Ambedkar, an 'active' conscience drives a man to 'undertake a crusade to eradicate the wrong' and 'fires him with a righteous indignation'. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, p. 197.
22. Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 2, p. 599 and vol. 1, pp. 51 and 143.
23. Das, *Thus Spoke Ambedkar*, vol. 1, pp. 34–5. A patriot is one who cares for his countrymen, whose 'humanity rises in protest against injustice', who is outraged by the harm done to them, and cannot bear to see them 'treated as being less than man'. See also Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 3, pp. 44, 97, where Ambedkar says that fellow feeling is 'a sentiment which leads an individual to identify with the good of others', a 'disposition... to treat man as the object of reverence and love'.
24. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 71. As he once said, 'Tell the slave he is a slave and he will revolt'.
25. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, pp. 67, 124, 143, and 581.
26. As Ambedkar said on 1 September 1951 while laying the foundation stone of Milind Mahavidyalaya at Aurangabad: 'The problem of raising the lower order in India... is to remove from them that inferiority complex which has stunted their growth and made them slaves to others, to create in them the consciousness of the significance of their lives for themselves and for the country, of which they have been cruelly robbed by the existing social order. Nothing can achieve this purpose except the spread of the higher education.' (Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 551).
27. Ambedkar, *Who Were the Shudras?* See also Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 143.
28. 'It is to the lower classes that we must look for the motive power of progress.' This was so because they challenged the established social order, sought equality, and possessed the solidarity and the organizational strength required for political struggle. See Velerian Rodrigues (ed.), *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 82.
29. Bhagwan Das, *Thus Spoke Ambedkar*, vol. 1, p. 87.
30. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 215.

31. Ambedkar wanted a 'proper admixture of different communities' in civil service. This may lead to a 'small degree of inefficiency', but it will correct caste biases of officers and inspire public confidence in the system. He agreed that the 'best' candidate should be selected for a job but insisted that one important feature of the 'best' candidate was impartiality and freedom from caste and class based antipathies and prejudices. Even the 'best' man shares the moral feelings of his class 'and may turn out to be the worst from the point of view of the servile classes'. Intellectual merit or professional qualification was necessary but not sufficient, and the definition of 'merit' or 'best' candidate should take full account of the required moral dimension. 'Mere efficiency', 'naked efficiency and nothing but efficiency' cannot be the only consideration. Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 9, pp. 476–7.
32. Rodrigues, *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, p. 93.
33. Ambedkar, *States and Minorities*, p. 47. The Lucknow Pact of 1916 endorsed weighted or disproportionate representation of provincial minorities in the assemblies constituted after the 1919 reforms in Bombay; 20 per cent of Muslims had 33 per cent of assembly seats.
34. Under the Communal Award, the untouchables voted in both the reserved and general constituencies and had two votes. Ambedkar thought that the value of the second vote 'as a political weapon was beyond reckoning', and that its loss under the Poona Pact did great damage to the cause of the untouchables (Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. IX, p. 90).
35. See Kshirsagar, *Political Thought of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*, p. 85.
36. In 1956, Ambedkar complained to his secretary Nanak Chand Rattu that 'the educated few have proved to be a worthless lot, with no sympathies for their downtrodden brethren'. They were busy 'fighting among themselves for leadership and power'. See N.C. Rattu, *Last Few Years of Dr Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Amrit Publishing House, 1997), p. 93.
 Ambedkar was acutely aware of the ways in which an individual's place in the social system shaped the structure of his thought and imposed what he called 'internal' limitation. As he once put it, 'People sometimes ask the idle question why the Pope does not introduce this or that reform. The true answer is that the revolutionist is not the kind of man who becomes a Pope, and that the man who becomes a Pope has no wish to be a revolutionist.' Rodrigues, *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, p. 145.
37. The Working Committee of his Scheduled Castes Federation resolved on 27 August 1955 that reservations for Scheduled Castes in the central and state legislatures should be abolished. In his *Thoughts on Linguistic States* written four months later, Ambedkar advanced a similar view and favoured plural member constituencies over separate electorates. B.R. Ambedkar, *Thoughts on Linguistic States* (Jullundher: Bheem Patrika, 1977 [1955]).

38. Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 3, p. 86.
39. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 410.
40. Ambedkar told Gandhi that he adopted Buddhism because it was 'the least harmful way for the country... for Buddhism is a part and parcel of Bharatiya culture. I have taken care that my conversion will not harm the tradition of the culture and history of this land'.

Dalit conversion to Buddhism on a mass scale goes back to 1901, when Jyothee Thass of Tamil Nadu, a Dalit leader, led his followers into Buddhism and said that this was really a return to their ancient religion. Other Dalit leaders showed a similar inclination in the 1920s and later. See G. Omvedt, *Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 145.

Ambedkar drew an important distinction between *dhamma* and religion. See Rodrigues, *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, pp. 57–8. The former is concerned with morality and is social in nature. By contrast, religion involves belief in God, rituals, and forms of worship, and is intensely personal. Since Buddhism was not a religion in this sense, Ambedkar was particularly sympathetic to it.

41. Ambedkar, *States and Minorities*, p. 46.
42. Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1, p. 143.
43. Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 5, pp. 270–1.
44. Bhagwan Das, *Thus Spoke Ambedkar*, vol. II, p. 188.
45. CAD, vol. XI, p. 625.
46. 'Without social union political unity is difficult to be achieved. If achieved, it would be as precarious as a summer sapling. ... With mere political unity India may be a state. But to be a state is not to be a nation, and a state, which is not a nation, has only small prospects of survival in the struggle for existence.' CAD, vol. 8, p. 193. Ambedkar thought that a multi-ethnic or 'composite' state needed to develop a strong sense of social unity to counter ethnic nationalism.
47. In spite of his strong commitment to the socialist economy, Ambedkar placed great emphasis on individual liberties and rights and called Article 32, which protected them, 'the soul of the Constitution'. *Constituent Assembly Debates*, vol. VII, p. 593.
48. For a critical assessment of Gandhi and Ambedkar in relation to untouchability, see Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform* (New Delhi: SAGE, 1999), Ch. 7.

Gandhi wrote to Sir Mirza Ismail: 'Having suffered like him in South Africa, Dr Ambedkar always carries my sympathy in all he says. He needs the gentlest treatment.' See his *Collected Works*, vol. 48, p. 208. There was a strong rumour that Gandhi wanted Ambedkar to be the first president of India. See *The Illustrated Weekly*, 23 January 1950. Gandhi wanted Nehru

to include Ambedkar in his cabinet. When Nehru and others appeared reluctant because Ambedkar 'had been attacking and maligning the Congress', Gandhi rejoined that power was coming to 'India and not to Congress'. See Rajmohan Gandhi, *The Good Boatman: A Portrait of Gandhi* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1995), p. 260.

49. CAD, vol. VII, p. 39.
50. Ambedkar thought that India needed a strong man to abolish the caste system. 'India wants a dictator like Kamal Pasha or Mussolini in social and political matters.' He was disappointed that Gandhi would not play that role. See Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 258. For Ambedkar, radical reform of Hinduism included such things as a single book acceptable to all Hindus, abolition of hereditary priesthood, passing an examination prescribed by the state and holding a *sanad* to qualify as a priest, the state limiting the number of priests and regulating their conduct, and so on. Ambedkar did not ask whether such a strange and highly authoritarian programme might not provoke fierce Hindu resistance, whether a secular state could undertake it, what was to be done if Hindus disagreed about which 'text' was central and which religious ceremonies were 'proper', why other religions should be excluded, and so on. See Moon, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1, pp. 76–7.
51. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, pp. 162 and 165–6.
52. Cited in Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 195.
53. Praising Michael Brecher's biography of him as 'the only good book written about me', Nehru went on: 'The only thing that really hurt me when I read the book was that Brecher made no mention of the one thing which I consider to have been my greatest contribution to India: getting the Hindu Code Bill passed into law. It was not easy, you know. Everybody was against it. I had to be patient, bide my time, wait for the opposition to weaken and get it passed bit by bit.' Taya Zinkin, *Reporting India* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962).
54. Nehru showed a similar lack of generosity when he did not attend Ambedkar's funeral. His reasons are not clear.
55. Ambedkar's four children died early. He wrote to his friend Dattoba Powar that 'he was a broken man' whose life was a 'garden full of weeds'. There were threats to his life, mostly through anonymous letters, some unstamped and for which he had to pay. He was also often subjected to vicious personal attacks. Even his marriage to Dr Sharda Kabir several years after the death of his first wife became controversial. He had to explain why he had married a Brahmin. He said rather insensitively that he wanted an educated woman, preferably a doctor, and that it was impossible to find one in the scheduled caste! Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 403. It is a measure of his courage and commitment to the cause of the Dalits

that he did not allow these and other experiences to weaken his resolve to fight for them.

56. Cited in Chavan Sheshrao, *Gandhi and Ambedkar: Saviours of Untouchables*, (Mumbai: Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001), p. 179. See also F. Watson and M. Brown, *Talking of Gandhiji* (London: Orient Longmans, 1957), pp. 9, 10. 'I never in my life called him Mahatma, he does not deserve that title. Not even from the point of view of morality.'
57. Cited in Sheshrao, *Gandhi and Ambedkar*, p. 182. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar*, p. 385.
58. Ambedkar's antipathy to Gandhi led him to misunderstand him on several issues. A simple but important example illustrates the point. When Gandhi decided to call the untouchables 'Harijans', Ambedkar like many others made no attempt to understand his reasons and joined them in accusing him of 'deceit', 'cunning', 'upper caste arrogance', being 'patronising', and so on. Gandhi's reasons were clearly stated in an article in *Harijan*, 11 February 1933, which few of them seem to have read. In all religions, says Gandhi, God is described as the 'help of the helpless and Protector of the weak'. Although all human beings are his children, the description is 'best' applied to those who are among the most wretched, abandoned, oppressed, helpless, and humiliated. The untouchables, 'these helpless and despised people', most 'surely' belong to this category and have the strongest claim on God's help. Gandhi's 'Harijans' thus has broadly the same meaning as 'Dalits'.

Chapter 5

1. For further discussion, see Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform* (New Delhi: SAGE, 1989), Ch. 2.
2. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1985 [1946]), pp. 53-4, 141-2.
3. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 55, 517.
4. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 222-3, 337-8.
5. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, p. 226.
6. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 263-4.
7. Gopal Sarvepalli, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 31. This is a recurrent theme in the writings of many Indian nationalists. For a fuller discussion of it, see Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, pp. 55-6.
8. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947-1964*, edited by G. Parthasarathi (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1985), vol.1, pp.160 and 173. For his excessive concern for foreigners' opinions, see also Walter Crocker, *Nehru: A Contemporary's Estimate* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), pp. 82-3.

9. Nehru's speeches on the subject both before and after Independence stress the 'rational' character of the state.
10. Nehru repeatedly invoked the role of 'subconscious cultural and historical memories' in his analysis of Gandhi. See, for example, his *Discovery of India*, pp. 358–9, 515–16.
11. It is striking that although Nehru was acutely aware of India's vast diversity and deep divisions, he paid little attention to the need to evolve a shared culture, even in its specifically political form, and had no well thought out cultural or educational policy. Thanks to his legacy, the Ministry of Education continued to enjoy a low status and even became a Ministry of Human Resources!
12. R.K. Karanjia, *The Philosophy of Mr Nehru* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 89.
13. Nehru repeatedly insisted that the Congress should encourage and cooperate with other political parties in undertaking nation-building activities. See his rebuke to B.C. Roy for thinking otherwise in Shriman Narayan, *Letters from Gandhi, Nehru, Vinoba* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1968), p. 85–6.
14. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, p. 407.
15. Baldev Singh (ed.), *Jawaharlal Nehru on Science and Society* (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1988), p. 202–3.
16. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 29–30. See also Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: Bodley Head, 1936), pp. 362–3, 591.
17. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 544.
18. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, pp. 458–9.
19. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 358–9.
20. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, pp. 72–3; Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 516–17.
21. Cited in Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Contemporary's Estimate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 218.
22. Cited in Baldev Raj Nayar, *India's Mixed Economy* (London: Popular Prakashan, 1989), p. 158.
23. Nayar, *India's Mixed Economy*; see also Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 410–11. The ideas of planned economy and the strong economic presence of the state were accepted even by the bourgeoisie. The Tata–Birla plan wanted to 'enlarge' the 'positive' functions of the state and limit profits and dividends.
24. Cited in Nayar, *India's Mixed Economy*, pp. 184, 185.
25. Cited in Nayar, *India's Mixed Economy*, p. 191.
26. The Nasik resolution of 1950 had declared the Congress objective to be one of creating a 'welfare state'. The Avadi resolution of 1955 spoke of the 'establishment of a socialistic pattern of society'. Nehru's choice of the strange term 'socialistic' rather than 'socialist' was intriguing and perhaps intended to reassure his right-wing critics.

27. The Bhubaneswar Congress session just before Nehru's death was an exception. Its resolution on 'Democracy and Socialism' explicitly committed it to providing every Indian with a 'national minimum' in food, clothing, housing, education, and health.
28. Cited in Nayar, *India's Mixed Economy*, p. 181.
29. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, p. 512-13. See also Singh, *Jawaharlal Nehru on Science*, pp. 77, 88, 107.
30. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 512-13.
31. The opposition was so fierce that Nehru had to drop the draft Hindu Code Bill in September 1951 just in case it damaged the Congress in the forthcoming elections. He took it up after the 1952 elections and got it passed in separate and attenuated bills in 1955 and 1956.
32. Even the policy of reservation is a positive form of protection. It protects the Scheduled Tribes and Castes from open competition by assigning them clearly demarcated areas of their own. The idea of protection inspires much of the Indian Constitution.
33. Nehru thought that the Asian Conference on Indonesia in Delhi in 1947 was a 'turning point in history' and 'enhanced the prestige of India all over the world'. During his American tour in 1949 he said that 'the future of Asia will be powerfully determined by the future of India, more and more the pivot of Asia' (Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers*, vol. I, p. 210).
34. Nehru's letters to chief ministers, especially in the early years of his premiership, contain countless references to the foreigners' opinion of India and the need to safeguard its 'reputation among progressive circles abroad'.
35. For good discussions, see Judith Brown, *Nehru: A Political Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), part 4; Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Penguin Books, 1997).
36. Karanjia, *The Philosophy of Mr Nehru*, p. 38.
37. Karanjia, *The Philosophy of Mr Nehru*, pp. 38, 142-3.
38. Nehru, *Discovery of India*, pp. 557-8.
39. Gopal, *Anthology*, p. 537.
40. Karanjia, *The Philosophy of Mr Nehru*, p. 143.

Chapter 6

1. W.H. Morris-Jones, *The Government and Politics of India* (London: Eothen Press, 1987), p. 86. Ambedkar called the cabinet 'a mere recording and registration office' for decisions taken by the prime minister and his 'coterie of advisers'. C.D. Deshmukh complained in 1956 that the cabinet was not consulted 'even by circulation' about the decision to separate Bombay from Maharashtra.

2. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947–1964*, edited by G. Parthasarathi (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 124–5.
3. In 1948, Nehru called corruption 'rampant' and a 'problem of great magnitude'. The complaint became bitter with the passage of time. See S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1987), Second Series, vol. 6, pp. 37, 367, 438, 439.
4. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: Bodley Head, 1936), p. 441–2, 445. Nehru thought that the virtues of the colonial ICS were highly exaggerated.
5. Nehru does not seem to have addressed the new Indian Administrative Service (IAS) recruits even once and generally asked Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Pant, or someone else to do so. In the *Journal of the National Academy of Administration* published since 1956, there is nothing of consequence written by Nehru.
6. Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), vol. III, p. 242.
7. Gopal, *A Biography*, vol. III, p. 240.
8. Gopal, *A Biography*, p. 243. The speech was delivered in November 1958.
9. Baldev Raj Nayar, *India's Mixed Economy* (London: Popular Prakashan, 1989), p. 157.
10. Gopal, *A Biography*.
11. Nayar, *India's Mixed Economy*, p. 165.
12. Gopal, *A Biography*, pp. 246–7.
13. See Nayar, *India's Mixed Economy*, pp. 254–5.
14. Baldev Singh (ed.), *Jawaharlal Nehru on Science and Society* (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1988), pp. 43–4, 88.

Chapter 7

1. Independence Day celebration is a short official affair, involving nothing more than the prime minister addressing the audience and through it the country. By contrast, the Republic Day celebration lasts a whole morning, involves the president but no formal speeches, celebrates the country's diversity through regional floats and parades, presents performances by school children, and so on. It belongs to the people in a way that the Independence Day celebration does not.
2. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, ed. H. Collins (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949 [1791]).
3. G.P. Deshpande (ed.), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule* (New Delhi: Leftwood, 2002), pp. 50–1.

4. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982).
5. Several Indian leaders drew their inspiration from the ancient Buddhist republics of which their knowledge was rather limited and which they tended to romanticize.
6. Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, pp. 365–6. Nehru first publicly declared himself both a socialist and a republican in his presidential address at the Lahore Congress session in 1929. For him, a republic involved not just a political but also a social revolution aiming at an egalitarian society. Such a revolution may involve violence, even terror, as in the French case, but it is 'a fleabite compared to the chronic evils of poverty and unemployment. The costs of social revolution, however great they might be, are less than these evils?' (Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, p. 380).
7. Nehru's presidential address at Lahore session of Congress in 1929.
8. *Constituent Assembly Debates* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1985), vol. III, p. 201. See the debate on 16 December 1948.
9. For Ambedkar, a republic was distinguished by a sense of fraternity and active mutual concern or what he also called a public conscience. For K.M. Munshi, a republic represented direct popular government, whereas democracy vested power in the elected representatives and sought 'to qualify the sovereignty of the republic'. K.M. Munshi, *Pilgrimage to Freedom* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967), p. 192.
10. For Nehru, Ambedkar, Phule, and others, the French Republic, not the classical Roman or the modern American Republic, was the paradigmatic example of a republic, and the chief source of their inspiration.
11. Drawing on the American tradition, conservatives in the US sometimes argue that their country is a republic not a democracy, wedded to individual liberty not equality or majoritarian rule. In India, the distinction was drawn differently and such an argument makes little sense.
12. For good discussions of what democracy has done to India, see Niraja Gopal Jayal (ed.), *Democracy in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012) and *State of Democracy in South Asia: A Report* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), prepared by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi.
13. See Mukulika Banerjee, *Why India Votes?* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 98–9 and 160ff. Some voters even think that voting is one's dharma and earns one spiritual merit.
14. Patrick French, *India: A Portrait* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).
15. In India, financial corruption has monopolized public concern to the detriment of other, sometimes for more disturbing, forms of unethical behaviour. A minister failing to master his brief, taking a poorly thought out important

decision, or undermining his colleagues hardly receives public criticism. It is worth noting that though financial corruption is now on a larger scale, it is not new. It occurred and was widely discussed during the Congress administration in the provinces between 1937 and 1939. It is also worth noting that it is not limited to politics. In fact, what goes on in the medical and legal professions and the universities is sometimes much worse.

16. India has a low rate of re-election. Only about 40 per cent of MPs manage to get re-elected. This encourages the tendency to maximize the gains of their office.
17. Parliamentary disruptions are caused by a number of factors. Sometimes they are provoked by the government's refusal to meet the opposition's legitimate demand for a debate. Sometimes this is the way major political parties push through unpopular decisions without a serious debate.
18. Almost all big scandals in recent years such as 2G spectrum, Adarsh society, Commonwealth Games irregularities, coal block allocations, and mining showed collusion between politicians, bureaucrats, and business.
19. Just over 80 per cent of the revenue of Indian publications comes from advertisements, aimed mainly at the affluent and middle class readership. While this generates a pressure to focus on issues of interest to this group, it can be resisted as in Japan, Thailand, Singapore, and many Western countries.
20. Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar, *The Indians: Portrait of a People* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2007), pp. 7–8.
21. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *The Burden of Democracy* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003). The book is an excellent Tocquevillian critique of India's deeply unequal social structure.
22. Explaining the reasons for his inability to prevent the gross misuse of the practice of putting a red or blue light on the roof of the car to evade normal traffic regulations, the head of police in New Delhi said that his officers were too 'junior in social status to the occupants of the car' to have the confidence to stop them. See Edward Luce, *In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India* (London: Little Brown, 2006), p. 23.
23. Edward Luce cites an interesting example (*In Spite of the Gods*, p. 204). Although he and his two friends had bought expensive tickets to watch a cricket match between India and England, they were denied entry to the ground along with thousands of other ticket-holders, many of whom had travelled long distances. Evidently, the president of the Delhi Cricket Club, who was also India's law minister, had got printed and sent out thousands of complementary tickets to VIPs. Since the ground was big enough to hold only the latter, most of the legitimate ticket-holders had to be turned away, with the mounted police charging an angry crowd.

24. For some amusing examples and a game theory-based analysis of Indian behaviour, see V. Raghunathan, *Games Indians Play: Why We Are the Way We Are* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006).
25. See Zareer Masani, *Indian Tales of the Raj* (London: BBC Books, 1987), pp. 135–6.
26. N.N. Vora, 'The Rusty Steel Frame', in *India at 50*, eds V.N. Narayanan and J. Sabarwal (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987), pp. 163–5.
27. C. Rajagopalachari, *Our Culture* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1963), pp. 18–19.
28. In 2008, the Central Vigilance Commission received 10,142 complaints. The figure shot up to 16,929 in 2011 and 37,039 in 2012. The Commission's report for 2013 shows that during the last three years, sanction for prosecution was granted against 26 IAS, four Indian Police Service (IPS), and predictably far more numerous Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officers. The scale of prosecution is unprecedented in post-Independence India.
29. Some firm action has been taken in recent years. Several leading politicians such as Lalu Yadav, Madhu Koda, Om Prakash Chautala, A. Raja, and Suresh Kalmadi have been jailed as have some senior civil servants. They, however, represent only a small proportion of those deserving punishment, took years to be punished, received special treatment in prison, and suffered no penalty on release.
30. The government's share of healthcare as a percentage of total health expenditure is one of the three lowest in the world, putting India in the company of Haiti and Sierra Leone. For an excellent critique of government policy in this and related areas, see Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2013).
31. Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen 'Putting Growth in its Place', *Outlook*, 14 November 2011, p. 59.
32. Even when parents do not send their children to private schools, they turn to private tuition. In West Bengal, 70 per cent of children in class 1–V, in Tripura 60 per cent, and in Bihar 52 per cent take private tuition. See Pratham's ninth *Annual Status of Education Report* for 2013.
33. See James Manor, 'Government and Opposition in India', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2011. I am most grateful to Professor Manor for his advice on this and related matters.
34. Jan Breman, *The Poverty Regime in Village India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).
35. Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1983), pp. 421–2.
36. Ramchandra Guha, *India after Gandhi* (London: Macmillan, 2007), p. 764.

Chapter 8

1. Walter Issacson, *Einstein: His Life and University* (New York: Simon and Schuster 2007), p. 438. Unlike the other three, Gandhi's picture was added later when Einstein became deeply interested in political issues. On his retirement, Ben Gurion, the first Israeli prime minister and one of its founding fathers, spent the last 10 years of his life in a cottage in Sole Boker. His large bedroom had only one picture—that of Gandhi. Jewish intellectuals and leaders had a particularly soft spot for Gandhi even as he was himself fascinated by them since his South Africa days.
2. During the Salt March, *Time* magazine referred to Gandhi as 'St. Gandhi' and made him its Man of the Year for 1930. More than 500 articles in the *New York Times* that year referred to Gandhi.
3. Reinhold Niebuhr was greatly attracted to Gandhi's non-violence and wrote an appreciative article in 1930. In his *Moral Man and Immoral Society* published some years later, he was more critical.
4. Albert Einstein, *Out of My Later Years* (New York: Castle Books, 2005 [1950]).
5. Issacson, *Einstein*, p. 527.
6. Gene Sharp, *Gandhi Wields the Weapon of Moral Power: Three Case Histories* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1960 [1953]).
7. It seems that Einstein did not send the message.
8. Martin Buber, 'Letter to Gandhi', in *The Pacifist Conscience*, ed. Peter Mayer, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).
9. As Hitler wrote to Lord Halifax in November 1937: 'All you have to do is to shoot Gandhi. If necessary, shoot more leaders of Congress. You will be surprised how quickly the trouble will die down.' Cited in Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People and an Empire* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006), p. 433. Hitler echoed the sentiment five years later. 'If we took India, the Indians would certainly not be enthusiastic, and they would not be slow to regret the good old days of English rule.' Cited in Dennis Dalton, *Nonviolence in Action: Gandhi's Power* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 229.
10. Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, trans. Isobel Best (London: T&T Clark International, 2010).

Chapter 9

1. Surprising as it may seem, the word 'non-violence' is of relatively recent origin, going back no further than 1920. Gandhi does not seem to have

- used it much in South Africa, if at all, and only occasionally during the early years of his return to India. It became common in his and others' writings in the 1920s.
2. Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: 1906–1945*, trans. Isabel Best, (London: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 172. Bonhoeffer had written to Gandhi, who sent him an invitation through Bishop Bell. For various reasons, his visit to India did not materialize. He had even planned the Gandhian type of ashrams in Germany.
 3. Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Towards Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 67. King went on: 'As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my scepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. Prior to reading Gandhi I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationships... but after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was.' (King Jr., *Stride Towards Freedom*, pp. 79–80). It is striking that Gandhi had few Catholic admirers and they were marginal to the Church. Pope Pius XI even refused to receive him during his visit to the Vatican. Today the general Catholic response to him is more favourable.
 4. 'I do not know myself who is a Gandhian.... Gandhism is a meaningless word for me. An "ism" follows the propounder of a system. I am not one.... This deserves to be properly understood.' Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), vol. 1, p. 64. On some occasions Gandhi went even further. 'I love to hear the word "Down with Gandhism". An "ism" deserves to be destroyed.... I have never dreamt of establishing a sect.' (Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings*, pp. 61, 423).
 5. I analyse this at length in my *Gandhi's Political Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1989), Ch. 6.
 6. 'I have come to the fundamental conclusion that if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also.' (*Young India*, 5 November 1931).
 7. *Young India*, 1 October 1931.
 8. Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 1, p. 437.
 9. John Morley, *On Compromise* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874).
 10. Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1983), p. 421.
 11. James M. Washington (ed.), *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 537. At mass meetings in preparation for the Birmingham March, King's colleagues required the marchers to sign a pledge card. The pledge involved self-purification, acting in a loving manner, purging themselves of hatred and violent tendency, and engaging in social service.

It would seem that although the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and King himself were totally committed to non-violence, they were not always averse to provoking their opponent to act brutally and benefiting from the widespread revulsion it aroused. They seem to have selected Birmingham, Alabama, for their 1963 campaign because 'Bull' Connor, the commissioner of public safety, was a known racist hothead who would not hesitate to use water cannons and dogs against the protesters. His actions were widely reported and condemned, and won public support for the civil rights movement, paving the way for President Johnson's Civil Rights Act the following year.

Some of Gandhi's followers too were inclined to benefit from the violence provoked by their actions. As Professor J.C. Kumarapa said in connection with the non-violent raid on salt works at Dharasana: 'Our expectation was that the government would open fire on unarmed crowds... our primary object was to show the world at large the fangs and claws of the Government in all its ugliness and ferocity. In this we have succeeded beyond measure.' *Young India*, 29 May 1930.

12. Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 2, pp. 133–4, 566–7 and vol. 3, pp. 204–5.
13. For good discussions, see Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Kurt Shock, 'Non-violent Action and Its Misconceptions', in *Peace Studies: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, ed. Matthew Evangelista (New York: Routledge, 2005); and Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (eds), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
14. *Young India*, 8 August 1929.
15. *Young India*, 19 March 1925.
16. At the height of the people's power movement in the Philippines in 1986, with the military split into opposite camps, one protestor got on an independent radio station and addressed his nephew, a key military officer: 'Artemio, this is your uncle Fred speaking.... Please listen to me.' He then went on to explain why his nephew should join the people. See Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, 'People Power Primed: Civilian Resistance and Democratisation', *Harvard International Review*, Summer 2005, p. 46.
17. Thomas Schelling, a distinguished strategy scholar, put the point with great clarity:

'The tyrant and his subjects are in somewhat symmetrical positions. They can deny *him* most of what he wants—they can, that is, if they have the disciplined organization to refuse collaboration. And *he* can deny them just about everything they want—he can deny it by using the force at his

command.... It is a bargaining situation in which either side, if adequately disciplined and organized, can deny most of what the other wants, and it remains to see who wins.' Cited in Ackerman and Duvall, 'People Power Primed', p. 44.

18. A non-violent movement makes the simple and unambiguous statement that people think it is time to take back the power they have alienated to the government. The Ukrainian student group captured this well when it decided to call itself 'Pora' (It's Time).
19. Gideon Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews* (Jerusalem, 1977). The book analyses Gandhi's correspondence with Jewish writers and leaders. See also Peter Meyer (ed.), *The Pacifist Conscience* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1960).
20. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 72, p. 361.
21. Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed Against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939–1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993).
22. B.H. Liddell Hart, 'Lessons from Resistance Movements—Guerilla and Non-Violent', in *Civilian Resistance as a National Defence: Non-Violent Action against Aggression*, ed. Adam Roberts (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1967), pp. 195–211.

In a study comparing the outcomes of scores of violent insurgencies with those of major non-violent movements between 1900 and 2006, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephen concluded that 50 per cent of the latter succeeded as opposed to a quarter of the former. They also found that far more non-violent struggles resulted in democratic governments than did the violent ones either immediately or after a brief interregnum. This has to do with, among others, the number and kind of people they attract. Unlike violent movements, non-violent struggles attract large numbers of women, middle class, clergy, the elderly, and so on, who bring with them their experience of civil society activism, social network, and access to the economic, political, and sometimes even the military elite.

23. 'My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statement on a given question, but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result has been that I have grown from truth to truth.' (*Harijan*, 30 September 1939).
24. As Gandhi once said, 'I want all the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.' He takes a similar view of religion. See Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, pp. 82–3, and *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Ch. 7.
25. On India's Independence Day, Gandhi was sitting in a Muslim house in Calcutta. An official of the Indian government asked him for a message.

- Gandhi said he had 'run dry'. When the official persisted, Gandhi remarked 'There is no message. If it is bad, let it be so.' When a BBC reporter turned up later with a similar request, Gandhi replied, 'You must forget that I know English.' He spent the Independence Day fasting and praying. See M.J. Akbar, *Nehru: The Making of India* (London: Viking, 1988), p. 42.
26. In response to a journalist's inquiry about his latest attire, Gandhi said, 'My loin cloth, if you so choose to describe it, is the dress of my principles. I must therefore wear the symbol of my mission.' Cited in Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi and the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 25.
 27. *Harijan*, 30 November 1947.
 28. *Harijan*, 7 April 1946. Gandhi's thought highlights the moral asymmetry lying at the heart of non-violence better than that of its most other advocates. For Gandhi, life itself is not an absolute or even the highest value, and one may, indeed should, sacrifice one's life for a great principle such as human dignity, justice, or self-respect. Another's life, even Hitler's, however, is an absolute value and one may not take it for any reason, not even a great principle.
 29. *Collected Works*, vol. LXXXVI, p. 6. Gandhi said this on 21 October 1946, just over a year before his assassination. See also *Harijan*, 31 August 1947.
 30. David Hardiman, *Gandhi: In his Time and Ours* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), p. 176.
 31. A Gandhian perspective has also inspired new forms of ownership in India and abroad that cut across the usual distinction between private and public property. Some make their employees full or partial owners of their business. Others retain the ownership but give away their profit to their employees, divide it between the latter and the wider society, or put it in charitable foundations. A detailed study of these experiments in ownership is badly needed.

Chapter 10

1. When a volume of essays including, among others, a substantially similar version of this one was sent to the University of Notre Dame Press who were under a contract to publish it, they showed some reluctance on the ground that since my essay made a reasonably coherent case for bin Laden and presented him in a sympathetic light, it could deeply offend many Americans and risked giving moral support to future jihadis. When the editor of the book refused to give in, the Press agreed to proceed with the publication if I made it clear, as I did, that my bin Laden did not refer to a recognizable historical individual but a hypothetical terrorist.

A couple of years later the essay was reproduced in *Prospect*, a leading British monthly. The editor, who was otherwise quite excited about it and had strong liberal commitments, worried that it made bin Laden and his cause look legitimate and might offend people. He suggested a couple of introductory sentences condemning terrorism and saying that my bin Laden was an intellectual construct—a metaphor referring not so much to the real man as to a more generic pro-terror radical Islamist. Since this did not misrepresent my view, I complied. The magazine's editor said at a public meeting a couple of years later that that particular issue had sold the largest number of copies!

I tell this story to show that academic writings cannot be dissociated from the wider world of politics, that *contra* Rawls our politics shapes what we consider to be a reasonable point of view, and that even the latter might be objected to if it goes against the prevailing prejudices or orthodoxy.

2. For good accounts of the ideas of Osama bin Laden, see Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (London: Widenfled and Nicholson, 2001); Yussef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (New York: Random House, 2001); Graham E. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
3. *The Quest for Sanity: Reflections on September 11 and the Aftermath* (London: Muslim Council of Britain, 2003), pp.18–19.
4. 'The collapse of the Soviet Union made the US more haughty and arrogant and it has started to look at itself as master of the world and established what it calls the New World Order.' (Quoted in Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, p. 21).
5. An audio message by Osama bin Laden broadcast on the Al Jazeera network on 11 February 2003.
6. 'The name of Clinton or that of the American government provokes disgust and revulsion. This is because [it] . . . directly reflects in our minds, the picture of the children who died in Iraq as a result of the economic sanctions.' (Quoted in Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, p. 23). See also *Nidaul Islam*, October–November 1996, <http://www.islam.org.au> (accessed 10 May 2014).
7. 'The American and British peoples stated widely that they support their leaders' decision to attack Iraq. This means that all individuals of these two nations . . . are belligerent people . . . They are enemies to us, whether they are involved in direct fight against us or pay their taxes.' (Bodansky, *Bin Laden*, p. 369). Exempted from Osama's retribution are those Americans who 'object to the American government's policy'. (Bodansky, *Bin Laden*, p. 24); see also Mir Hamid, 'Osama Claims He Has Nukes', *Dawn*, 10 November 2001.
8. See Hamid, 'Osama Claims He Has Nukes'.

9. Transcript of bin Laden's October interview (with Al Jazeera television correspondent Tayseer Alomii in 2001), CNN, 5 February 2002. See also the interview with some of bin Laden's followers in May 1998, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/interview.html (accessed 10 May 2014).
10. For Gandhi's views, see Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), vol. 3.
11. See Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989), Ch. 5.
12. For a good analysis of the different interpretations of the Qur'an and the debates between them, see Joshua Cohen and Ian Lague (eds), *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).
13. This is based on the remarks made by a diplomat at a seminar. He said he had asked Yasser Arafat during a long conversation why he had not thought of Gandhian non-violence. Arafat replied he had but rejected it for these reasons, especially the deep penetration of Israeli intelligence among the Palestinians that ruled out any kind of careful planning and organizational discipline.
14. 'I have benefited... greatly from the *jihad* in Afghanistan.... What we benefited from most was [that] the glory and myth of the superpower was destroyed not only in my mind but also of all Muslims.' (Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, p. 63).

Chapter II

1. For a fuller discussion, see my *Gandhi's Political Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1989), Ch. 3.
2. *Harijan*, 10 February 1940, 25 April 1936, and 4 August 1946. See also Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), vol. 1, p. 504.
3. M.K. Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1958), vol. 77, p. 390; *Harijan*, 23 March 1940 and 16 February 1934. For Gandhi, they could be punishment for human sins and misdeeds, a view he invoked in relation to the Bihar earthquake and which I discuss in Chapter 3 in this book.
4. This is not peculiar to Gandhi. It goes back to Aquinas and even earlier. As Aquinas puts it in *Summa Theologica* (II/II, Q.I art.2): 'Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower.'
5. *Collected Works*, vol. 50, pp. 200–1. For Gandhi, the cosmic power acts from countless points in the universe and through innumerable agencies. The personalized view of God centralizes and gives a distorted view of it.

6. For a good discussion of Gandhi's view of relative truth, see Douglas Allen, 'Gandhi, Contemporary Political Thinking, and Self-Other Relations' in *Gandhi's Experiments with Truth: Essential Writings by and about Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Richard L. Johnson (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2006), especially pp. 316ff. Gandhi's impersonal God resembles Paul Tillich's 'God above the God of theism'.
7. 'I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. I believe the Bible, the Quran, and the Zend-Avesta to be as much divinely inspired as the Vedas.' (*Collected Works*, vol. 21, p. 246). See also Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings*, vol. 1, p. 543, where Gandhi says, 'All religions are divinely inspired, but they are imperfect because they are products of the human mind and taught by human beings.' Claiming like Gandhi to offer a 'religious solution of the problem of religious diversity', Reinhold Niebuhr, who greatly admired Gandhi, observed: 'It requires that religious convictions be sincerely and devoutly held while yet the sinful and finite corruptions of these convictions be humbly acknowledged; and the actual fruits of other faiths be generously estimated.' Niebuhr insisted that religious tolerance is best based on 'religiously inspired humility'. See his *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), pp. 134–5.
8. Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings*, vol. 1, p. 478; see also pp. 470–1, 494–5, 502–3. Cf. Karl Barth, 'The Christian religion is true, because it has pleased God, who alone can be the judge in this matter, to affirm it to be the true religion.' See his *Church Dogmatics*, trans. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), p. 350. Gandhi would find such a view circular and arrogant, even perhaps blasphemous.

Gandhi gave a course of lectures on the Bible at Gujarat Vidyapith in 1926, the year he left active politics. Nagindas Parekh, an eminent writer, attended them and published his extensive notes in *Sanskriti*, October–December, 1984. His article throws light on how Gandhi wanted the reading of religious scriptures to avoid both *akṣharvād* (literalism) and *śāstrārthvād* (reducing them to what reason approves). For him, the former were *Pharisees*, the latter *Sadducees*.

In the lectures Gandhi gave a clue to his method of religious and social reform. Jesus was spiritually more advanced than John and need not have received baptism from him, but he did so in order to avoid confusion and controversy about the importance of baptism and whether all should receive it. This is how great reformers should behave. They should not break with the customary practice all of a sudden but rather give it a different meaning and subtly prepare the ground for a new one.

9. *Young India*, 22 September 1947. See also Iyer, vol. 1, p. 543.

10. Even if 'the man called Jesus never lived... the Sermon on the Mount would still be true for me.' *Harjjan*, 31 December 1931. Its authority depends not only on its author but its power to convince reason and 'move the heart'.
11. Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings*, vol. 1, p. 517.
12. Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings*. Gandhi asserts: 'I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense.' When some Muslim women were stoned to death for their alleged misdeeds in Afghanistan, Gandhi criticized it, saying it cannot be defended 'on the ground of its mere mention in the Koran' as its defenders had maintained. He went on, 'every formula of every religion has in this age of reason to submit to the acid test of reason and universal justice if it is to ask for universal assent'. When Maulana Zakar Ali Khan rejoined that 'the Koran is an unalterable law which transcends... puny humanity', Gandhi replied that 'even the teachings themselves of the Koran cannot be exempt from criticism. Every true scripture only gains by criticism.' (Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings*, p. 478).
13. Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings*, vol. I, pp. 502-3 and 528-9.
14. M.K. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1956), p. 113 (translation amended). See also Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings*, vol. 1, pp. 469ff.

Gandhi's four criteria are basically moral, and derived from his view that morality is central to religion. 'There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man, for instance, cannot be untrustful, cruel and incontinent and claim to have God on his side.' (*Young India*, 24 November 1921).

15. Like many Hindus, Gandhi grew up knowing little about the basic doctrines and texts of his religion, and first studied them when as a student in London he was shamed into doing so by the questions asked by his new friends and associates. In London he discovered both Hinduism and Christianity more or less simultaneously, read each in the light of the other, and emerged a proud and open-minded Hindu with a deep appreciation of the ethics of Christianity.

Although Gandhi was profoundly influenced by the life and teachings of Jesus, his thought had a strong Hindu core and contained elements that sat ill at ease with Christianity; for example, his approach to truth, his view of prophets as spiritual explorers, way of reconciling faith and reason, rejection of vicarious atonement, law of karma, and his ideas of non-attachment, religious inclusivism, and pluralism.

Islam influenced Gandhi during his childhood through his mother's Pranami sect. The sect's chief propounder Meghraj Thakkar (1618-94) had spent six years in Arabia to attend to family business and claimed to combine the teachings of various faiths. It accepts the Qur'an and the Purānās

as revealed texts; rejects idol worship; and was profoundly influenced by Kabir, Nanak, and Dara Shikoh.

16. 'There is in Hinduism room enough for Jesus as there is for Mohammed, Zoroaster and Moses. For me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree.' (*Harjjan*, 30 January 1937). Elsewhere Gandhi observed, 'Just as preservation of one's own culture does not mean contempt for that of others, but requires assimilation of the best that there may be in all the other cultures, even so should be the case with religion.' (Iyer, *Moral and Political Writings*, vol. 1, p. 451).
17. For a striking example, see G.G. Joseph, *George Joseph: The Life and Times of a Kerala Christian Nationalist* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2003), p. XI. Susannah Joseph, Gandhi's admirer and wife of one of his associates, asked the local priest where Gandhi's soul would go after his death. The priest replied, as he had done in relation to many others, that since Gandhi had known but rejected Catholicism, 'the true path to salvation', his soul would be consigned to hell. Susannah was outraged and even thought of leaving the religion that took such a view. A Jesuit priest was called in to save the situation. He said the final resting place for Gandhi's soul would be 'limbo' as was the case with the ancient Greek savants; see Joseph, *Life and Times of a Kerala Christian Nationalist*, p. XI. Not to be outdone, some Muslim theologians declared during Gandhi's lifetime that even a Muslim of 'low character' was religiously, though not morally, superior to him and stood a better chance of going to heaven.

Chapter 12

1. *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. D.M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), Book I, p. 136.
2. For the ancient Greeks and Romans, friendship was largely based on mutual interest and support. The idea of disinterested friendship (*philia*) was first fully articulated by Aristotle, but it was limited to those 'who are good and alike in virtue' and united by their shared love of the good. See *Nichomachean Ethics* (8, 3, 1156a 1419). For a good discussion see A.W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), Ch. 4. The Epicureans saw friendship as a welcome relief from social and political life, and based it largely on shared intellectual interests. For St. Augustine, friendship was only possible among those sharing a common faith, and even then its intensity was always suspected. In China, friendship was traditionally seen not as a private relationship as in the modern West but as a social relation that was subject to certain constraints. 'Yu', meaning

friend in classical Chinese, is homophonous with 'Yu' meaning the 'right hand' as opposed to the 'left'. A friend is 'at hand', walks 'hand in hand', and is above all a morally superior person to whom one can defer and who contributes to one's moral development.

3. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1966), p. 16. Gandhi had many colleagues of whom he was fond and to some of whom he was deeply attached but none save Charles Andrews was on a first name basis with him or enjoyed an easy informality.
4. The term *dost* or *dosti*, which is largely of Persian origin and implies informality, deep emotional bonds, and loyalty, introduces a new conception of friendship in Indian thought during the Muslim rule. The Western idea of friendship arrived towards the end of the eighteenth century, and did not get assimilated into Indian thought and regional literature until a few decades later.
5. The relation between Draupadi and Krishna is intriguing. They are not lovers but there are tantalizing hints of an erotic dimension. Draupadi refers to herself as *tava Krishna priyā sakhi* (*Udyoga Parva*, Ch, 80, sloka 21) and *tava krishna sakhi* (*Aranyaka Parva*, ch.13, sloka 53). In *Aswametha Parva*, when Arjuna is absent, Draupadi casts a mischievous and suggestive glance at Krishna, who acknowledges and responds to it (Ch. 89, Sloka 10).
6. Mahābhārata uses Karnaparvan to diversify the vocabulary of friendship: suhrd (6, 18; 27, 68; 28, 2; 46, 9; 49, 1; 64, 26; 67, 19), mitra (27, 73; 29, 21/3; 46/9; 64, 27), and sakhi (27, 94; 64, 29). See also Hemadri's commentary on *Raghuvansa* (5:58) which shows the historical continuity of the vocabulary;

Atyāgsahano bandhu, sadaivānumatah suhrat

Ekakriyo bhavenmitram samaprāna sakhāmatah

In the *Gitā*, the three terms are used within a short space of twelve shlokas in the opening chapter. Shloka 26 talks of sakha, 27 of suhrd, and 38 of mitra. The distinction should not be pressed too hard however. Here, as elsewhere in this chapter, I have greatly benefited from the perceptive comments by Professor Richard Gombrich of the University of Oxford.

7. *Rāmāyana*, 6.3576*.3.
8. *Rāmāyana*, 6.3576*.4.
9. *Rāmāyana*, 6.3576*.4. The idea of a friend as a bahisprāna also appears in European thought. For Aristotle as for Plato, a true friend is *allos autos*, oneself in another form or an extension of oneself. Cicero calls a friend *alter idem*, the same in another form. Thomas Aquinas calls him *alter ipse* and says that a friend is another self, 'if not the same, yet very nearly so'.

- For a helpful discussion, see Suzanne Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Friendship* (New York: State University of New York, 1995), pp. 12–13.
10. Gitā, 11:41. See also 11:44, and Mahābhārata, 9,56,29/30. In a Hindu marriage, the newly wedded couple pledges to develop the relation of *sakhya* (*Sakhi saptapadi bhavet*).
 11. *Karnaparvan*, 8,57,48 talks of *drstvā krsnāvekarathe sametau* (having seen the two Krishnas together on one chariot). See also Mahābhārata, 2:48.
 12. The charioteer and the warrior must have absolute trust in each other as the life of each is in the other's hands. In the roughly 966 combat scenes in the battle of Kurukshetra, 155 (that is about 16 per cent) charioteers were killed. See Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee (eds), *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the Mahabharata—Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), Ch. 16.
 13. *Karnaparvan*, 8,46,9. Another verse stresses three basic qualities of friends: they introduce their wives to each other, go to each other's home as and when they wish, and reveal their secrets to each other (*Darshitani Kalatrani grihebhuktam yathapsitam; Kathitani rahasyani sauhrdam kimatah param*). These relations signify complete trust, easy informality, and absence of social inhibition.
 14. *Karnaparvan*, 51,61.
 15. Rāmāyana, 5.652*.2.
 16. G. Buhler (ed.), *The Laws of Manu* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1948), 3,160; 5,82; 11,59. See also *Vishnu Purāna*, 2,6,11.
 17. Karna accuses Salya of being a *mitradrohi* (one who betrays or injures friends). He could kill him but would not. 'Because you are a *sakhā*, a *suhrd* and also a *mitra* (*sakhibhāvena sauhardānmitrabhāvena caiva hi*), for these three reasons, Salya, you now live.' (i.386*.1) Karna has clearly in mind three different relations in which he and Salya stand, for which he needs three different terms. It would appear that he regarded Salya as a *mitra* because he was an ally of and supported Duryodhana, as a *suhrd* because he was generally, though not during the great war, well disposed to Karna, and as a *sakhā* because he was his charioteer. It is striking that the *Karnaparvan* represents one of the major occasions for a careful articulation of the vocabulary of friendship in classical Indian literature.
 18. Mahābhārata, 8,67,20. For a further discussion, see Norman Brown, 'Duty as Truth in Ancient India', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* (1972), pp. 262–8.
 19. Aristotle conceptualizes the conflict between friendship and self-sufficiency differently. Human beings need love, pleasure, self-knowledge, and so on, and these are provided by friends. Individuals with friends are for him more self-sufficient than those without.

20. Cited in Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy*, p. 49.
21. Cited in Stern-Gillet, *Aristotle's Philosophy*.
22. The Indian view of friendship has greatly benefited from the Islamic, especially the Iranian, and the modern Western ideas of friendship, as seen in the variety of words used to describe friends and the forms of attachment and loyalty to them. Their impact on it deserves to be examined.

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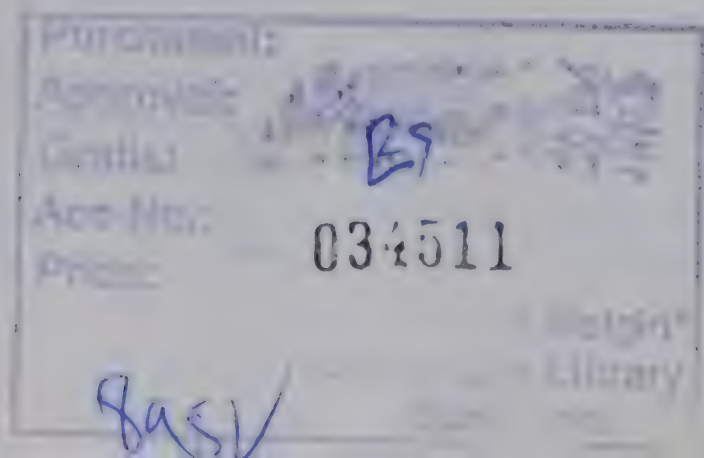
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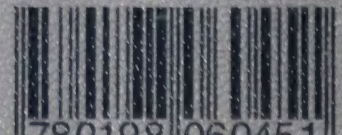
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